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ABSTRACT

The articles in this focused issue draw attention to works of contemporary literature with classroom potential. Four articles suggest new approaches for the reading and teaching of such established writers as Robert Frost; Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.; Eudora Welty; and Saul Bellow. Two other articles examine the bestsellers "Ordinary People" and "The Color Purple." Literature for the adolescent is represented by "Halfway Down Paddy Lane," a novel that can serve as the basis for a tri-level analysis demonstrating in detail how the elements of fiction can be effectively introduced using a teenage book. Reviews and suggestions for teaching two fantasy writers--Lloyd Alexander and Ursula Le Guin--are presented. Finally, Theodore Strugeon's "More Than Human" is discussed as a classic of modern science fiction. (HOD)

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WINTER 1985

ON CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE:
Critiques, Reviews and Recommendations

ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN

ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

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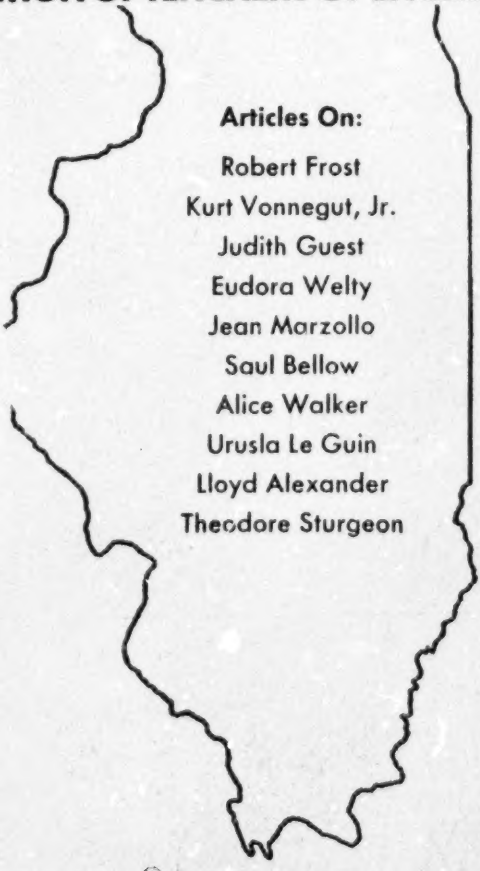

Articles On:

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ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN

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About This Issue

Teachers writing for this issue have ranged widely in their search for works of contemporary literature with classroom potential. Four articles suggest new approaches for the reading and teaching of such established writers as Robert Frost, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Eudora Welty and Saul Bellow. Two teachers look at the current bestsellers *Ordinary People*, a novel further popularized by the Oscar-winning film, and *The Color Purple*, last year's most talked about and honored work of black literature. Literature for the adolescent is represented by *Halfway Down Paddy Lane*, a novel good enough to serve as the basis for a tri-level analysis demonstrating in detail how the elements of fiction can be effectively introduced using a teenage book. And fantasy, one of the most popular categories for today's young readers, is represented by reviews and suggestions for teaching two of today's best known writers: Lloyd Alexander and Ursula Le Guin. Finally, Theodore Sturgeon's *More Than Human* is championed as a classic of modern science fiction.

Dorothy Matthews
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The Speaker in "The Road Not Taken": Edward Thomas or Robert Frost?

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In his *Robert Frost Handbook* James L. Potter contends that to read "The Road Not Taken" as it should be read one must know that the speaker in the poem is Edward Thomas, not Robert Frost. Potter says that if read as a statement about Frost the poem lacks irony and fades away into a "sentimental justification of following one's personal bent, of being an individual."[1] We fail to see, Potter says, that Frost is "mocking Thomas's habit of fretting over choices, present and past."[2] Is there nothing to be said, then, for reading "The Road Not Taken" with Frost as the speaker? Did he at any time during his life see the poem as a statement about himself? Is the poem with Frost as speaker without subtlety, without ambiguity or irony? What was Frost's attitude toward the poem, in the beginning and through the years until his death in 1963?

Was Frost thinking of Edward Thomas when he wrote "The Road Not Taken"? He did write it in England in 1914 while spending a great deal of time with Thomas, his British friend. The poem does describe Thomas's rather lonely, isolated life, a way less traveled by; and on numerous occasions, right after writing the poem especially, Frost said it was more about Thomas than himself.[3] Thomas concurred. Not long after Frost returned to the States he sent a copy of the poem without comment to Thomas, who saw in it a better description of himself than of Frost. Others have argued, however, that Frost more than likely was thinking of himself when he wrote the poem.[4] About four years before writing it Frost, while out for an evening walk in Plymouth, New Hampshire, saw at a point where two roads met in a wood what appeared to be himself coming from another direction. Surprised that he did not collide with the other self, Frost stood amazed and watched him pass. While some critics insist on this experience as the basis for the poem, Frost never mentioned it.

The most direct statement about "The Road Not Taken" is a letter Frost wrote to Crystine Yates, a young girl in Dickson, Tennessee.[5] She wrote Frost to ask if the sigh in the last stanza

were one of regret or one of satisfaction. A transcription of Frost's response to Ms. Yates follows:

Amherst Mass April 1925

Dear Miss Yates:

No wonder you were a little puzzled over the end of my Road Not Taken. It was my rather private jest at the expense of those who might *think* I would yet live to be sorry for the way I had taken in life. I suppose I was gently teasing them. I'm not really a very regretful person, but for your solicitousness on my behalf I'm

Your friend always
Robert Frost

This letter to Ms. Yates, written eleven years after Frost wrote the poem, says nothing about Edward Thomas. Do we assume that Frost treated Ms. Yates, a high school student at the time, as a special audience not capable of dealing with the kind of subtlety he was still insisting on eleven years after he wrote it? Did he still want "adult" readers to see it as a tricky poem, a viewpoint he apparently held shortly after writing it? In a letter to his friend Louis Untermeyer he wrote in September, 1915: "I am only fooling my way along as I was in the poems in *The Atlantic* (particularly in The Road Not Taken) as I was in what I said about Spoon River. I trust my meaning is not too hidden in any of these places. I can't help my way of coming at things."[6]

Was Frost still holding out for subtlety, that is, for Edward Thomas as speaker when many years later he read the poem on his Russian tour in August, 1962, shortly before his death in January the following year? I think it reasonable to assume that Frost's own interpretation of "The Road Not Taken" changed through the years. When he wrote it in 1914, no doubt he was thinking of Thomas, and for a number of years thereafter apparently he was still thinking of Thomas when he insisted in correspondence with close friends and in public meetings that the poem was tricky. Even during the years after his correspondence with Ms. Yates he refused to give direct answers to questions about "The Road Not Taken." This stance is in accord with Frost's doubt as to whether his poems were subtle enough. He was afraid they would be considered too simple and so, according to some, particularly other poets, not very good. That was Frost's chief concern, perhaps more important to him than anything else. Am I a good poet? — that was his worry.

But by the time Frost wrote Ms. Yates in 1925 I believe he was beginning to lose sight of the subtlety related to Edward Thomas. Perhaps his letter to her, the poet in the quietness of his study answering an honest question from a young student in a faraway state, expresses his true feelings about the poem, notwithstanding his public protestations. And when reading the poem to Russian audiences in 1962 he was more than willing for them to hear it as a statement about the American poet Robert Frost.

Through the years, then, "The Road Not Taken" was for Frost a dynamic phenomenon. The change in interpretation brought change in appreciation. Clearly Frost liked the poem when he first wrote it: he read it publicly even before he published it. He included it in his first public reading held at Tufts College, May 5, 1915. His attempts to get people to understand it his way during the early years perhaps made him weary of the *poem*, not just the interpretive problems surrounding it. This weariness appears to manifest itself in letters Frost wrote to Louis Untermeyer, especially during the early 30s. Untermeyer, preparing anthologies then, made a practice of including Frost's poems. In letters to Untermeyer, Frost from time to time listed poems he would like included, and "The Road Not Taken" is conspicuously absent from the lists.[7]

Nevertheless, through the years it became apparent to Frost that the poem described his own life, and the description is best seen in the last stanza, one that has subtlety even if read autobiographically. The last stanza does not say whether the descision, Frost's decision to give his life to poetry, turned out for good or not. The stanza is ambiguous. And it is this very ambiguity that Frost, I believe, came to appreciate. His decision to write poetry at any cost brought him wonderful experiences, even world-wide fame — but it brought him great heartache, too. At least he perceived it that way. Frost's letters provide overwhelming evidence. For example, as early as 1937 he wrote to Untermeyer: "Waterboy you are! Where are you hidin? Sometimes I feel as if I deserved a hidin myself for the selfish way I have behaved in life. I heard someone say to an audience in public that he was the opposite from me: whereas I had never done a thing except for the fun of it, he had never done a thing except from a sense of duty. Its (sic) an almost true picture of me."[8] That is, while poetry brought him fame, fun if you please, it seduced him away from duty, at times no doubt familial duties, something he was never able to forgive himself for. Frost came to see in "The Road Not Taken" the pain and the joy of his own experience, and for

that very reason, especially during the later years, I believe, had a growing appreciation for it.

Apparently Frost wrote "The Road Not Taken" with Edward Thomas in mind. As Potter says, he was mocking Thomas's regretfulness, not his own. He played a game, even in writing the poem, and the game did make for the kind of delicate distinction Frost wanted his readers to understand. He continued the game for a number of years, trying to get them to see a particular subtlety. But by the time he wrote Ms. Yates in 1925 he was growing tired of the game and willing for her to read the poem as a statement about himself. He was beginning to see an ambiguity, an irony that he had not originally intended. When he read the poem to Russian audiences not long before his death, Frost realized that "The Road Not Taken" was a statement about his own decision to give his life to poetry.

NOTES

[1] (Pennsylvania Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980), p. 52.

[2] Potter, *Handbook*, p. 52.

[3] Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, *Robert Frost: The Trial by Existence* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 89.

[4] Jean Gould, *Robert Frost: The Aim Was Song* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1964), p. 99.

[5] Permission to use the Frost letter has been granted by the Estate of Robert Frost, Alfred C. Edwards, Trustee. The letter may not be reproduced without permission from the Estate. Crystine Yates, later Ms. Aubrey F. Soyars, moved to Nashville, Tennessee, where she lived until her death last spring. Ms. Soyars gave me the letter sometime during the late 60s.

[6] *Selected Letters of Robert Frost*, ed. Lawrence Thompson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 189.

[7] *The Letters of Robert Frost to Louis Untermeyer*, ed. Louis Untermeyer (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), pp. 209-10, 213.

[8] Untermeyer, *Letters*, p. 294.

Slaughterhouse-Five: Kurt Vonnegut's Idea of Theatre

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Considerations of structure continue to perplex critics of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. W. D. McGinnis refers to the

novel's "arbitrary cycle," a phrase suggestive of a cyclic but randomly formed plan characterized by "brief clumps of symbols separated by stars." McGinnis also identifies certain cinematic qualities. Yet the novel remains "without beginning, middle, and end, without suspense, and without a moral."[1] In somewhat the same spirit, R. Giannone tells us that the book "is disjointed in chronology, fragmented in plot development, and proceeds in isolated paragraphic units interspersed with graffiti. The book confuses, and it is meant to. In fact, the pages look as though a bomb dropped on the galley proofs."[2] To E. Grossman, the style of writing "... attempts to get at something by the accretion of extremely unconnected bits in time and space ... the bombing of Dresden actually disappears in the shadows thrown by placard-like announcements from the narrator."[3] P. B. Messent attributes the author's fictional style to an attempt to adapt to the chaos of the modern age, citing the book's "telegraphic form, with short, self-sufficient paragraphs."[4] To J. R. May, *Slaughterhouse* is "bleakly deterministic" in tone, a tone set "by the very structure of the book...."[5] Oddly enough, this structure induces McGinnis to remark that *Slaughterhouse* is Vonnegut's "most hopeful novel to date."[6]

In all likelihood, one more treatment of the novel's structure will not quell the critical storm over the book. This study focuses on Vonnegut's use of theatrical and film motifs, especially as they are embodied in "cameo" roles and bit parts. Careful analysis of these characters and events through the perspective of theatrical and film production will reveal a definite pattern in the complex tapestry of *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

In brief, Vonnegut begins by using cameos that feature a high degree of harmony in terms of production factors; as the novel moves along, these factors cease to be in accord. Finally, the book ends when Vonnegut simply clears the stage.

The first dramatic bit part concerns Lot's wife, a familiar biblical allusion.[7] Forbidden to view the carnage of what was once the city of Sodom, she nevertheless turns to view it and is at once transformed into a pillar of salt. Lot's wife, frozen as in a photograph or single frame from a film, is simultaneously the actress and the audience while God plays the role of director or producer.

Producer, actor, and audience also come together smoothly in the next vignette, Roland Weary's photograph of a woman and a Shetland pony posed in an attempted sexual act in front of "velvet draperies ... flanked by Doric columns" (40). Again, the actors

are fully involved in their roles, as is the audience, and the producers take great pride, Vonnegut informs us, in creating "the first dirty photograph in history," produced in 1839. Moreover, Andre Le Fevre, assistant in the production, argued that the photo was an example of "fine art," in an attempt to make "Greek mythology come alive" (41).

Perhaps not so coincidentally, both examples are associated with the demise of cities, the first, Sodom, and the second, Troy (or Ilium, which doubles as the name of Billy Pilgrim's hometown, Ilium, New York). These connections are worthy of note because of Dresden, which is drawn by Vonnegut as the antithesis of Sodom in moral terms as well as being the antithesis of Troy in military significance. Viewed as a larger dramatic episode, the bombing of Dresden finds the actors and producers in accord, but the audience either annihilated or confused about what they have witnessed; Vonnegut himself confesses that, despite his firsthand experience and a desire to write his "Dresden book," not enough words about Dresden came to my mind [then] . . . and not many come now, either . . ." (2). A kindred response occurs when Billy watches a movie "about American bombers in the Second World War and the gallant men who flew them" (74). Billy, "slightly unstuck in time," runs it backwards and forwards in his mind, the reversed version generating a pronounced anti-war stance; the German city alluded to may easily be Dresden, of course. As told, this account is really a negation of experience which records Billy's (Vonnegut's) desire to avoid participation in the process of war. In dramatic terms, the audience does not enjoy the play.

Aspects of dramatic production continue to go astray. Billy Pilgrim's smile, "as peculiar as Mona Lisa's" (58), is unnatural and posed. In this case, a German photographer wants an actual capture of Americans on film. Billy climbs out from the shrubbery he has been tossed into, "his face wreathed in goofy good will." The photo is to serve as "heartening evidence of how miserably equipped the American army was . . ." (58). The performance is staged, but the acting from this account is bad; moreover, who will see the picture? And what propaganda value can it have; all German hopes for victory have been (or are about to be) destroyed.

Similarly, Vonnegut introduces us to a German colonel and his "unpainted whore" who watch the procession of American prisoners of war; a German camera records "the fabulous victory" but as Billy and Weary pass, we learn that the photographer "had run out of film hours ago" (65). Again, we are left with questions.

Is the unpainted "actress" already finished with her performance — like the camera — or is she not ready to perform — like the camera? Is a victory still a victory if it cannot be recorded? Just as Billy's Mona Lisa smile exists as an emblem of emptiness for the German cause, so perhaps the filmless camera records what the Germans have really won — nothing. Significantly, Billy's role in each presentation is equally meaningless.

"Audience" factors continue to mar the next three cameos as well. For example, the "Gay Nineties" photograph located on the refrigerator in Billy's living quarters on Tralfamadore seems technically acceptable, but Billy (as audience), in trying "to think something about the couple" in the picture, comes up with a total blank: "Nothing came to him. There didn't seem to be *anything* to think about those two people" (113). The second part of this group of vignettes concerns the Polish man hanged for having sexual intercourse with a German woman. The performers perform, but the audience — this time, the German army — disapproves (155-6). Finally, Howard Campbell, Jr., a Nazi sympathizer, attempts to enlist American prisoners in the "Free American Corps" a German unit to be comprised of American prisoners to fight on the Russian front. Not only does Campbell use food as an inducement, but he also gets into costume for his "part." His attire is quite extravagant:

> He wore a ten-gallon hat and black cowboy boots decorated with swastikas and stars. He was sheathed in a blue body stocking which had yellow stripes running from his armpits to his ankles. His shoulder patch was a silhouette of Abraham Lincoln's profile in a field of pale green. He had a broad armband which was red, with a blue swastika in a circle of white (162-3).

Costuming is also used in what might arguably be the most negative cameo in the novel; it is the scene of the middle-aged couple who were once obstetricians. They watch Billy's inadvertent mistreatment of the horses that pull the green, coffin-shaped wagon (196-7). Billy is "ridiculous" in his "costume" — an azure toga and silver shoes, remnants of his concentration camp stay. Because of his clownish appearance, the couple try to speak to him in Polish first; Vonnegut confides that "the wretched Poles were the involuntary clowns of the Second World War" (197). As a dramatic scene, this episode is a failure; the audience (the couple) is highly displeased, the performer (Billy) does not seem to comprehend what he is doing, and the production seems doomed to imminent failure as the horses — mouths bloody from Billy's tug-

ging too hard on the reins, hooves broken and painful, the horses mad with thirst — can barely continue. Adding to the pathos of this scene are the facts that there are no longer any babies for the couple to deliver since "the hospitals were all burned down"; furthermore, the author notes that the couple, "so involved with babies, had never reproduced themselves, though they could have" (196). Here, the denial of new life, and even of continuing existence, seems very strong.

The final cameo concerns a Maori who had been captured in Tobruk; Billy is paired with him as a digger after the Dresden fire-bombing. The intensity of the fires and their accompanying heat had often killed people, not by burning, but by suffocation. People died in the positions they had assumed right before the firestorms sucked away all the oxygen. Unmarked, "they were sitting on benches" in basements underneath the "moonscape" of rubble and debris. Vonnegut compares the scene underground to a "wax museum," that is, before the corpses began to "liquify" and smell "like roses and mustard gas" in the world's first "corpse mine" (214). The corpses comprise a truly captive audience; the Maori is too late for the performance they have witnessed (the firestorm) but arrive in time to die of the "dry heaves" ("He tore himself to pieces, throwing up and throwing up.") (214).

The last page of the novel begins in a kind of vacuum, all the soldiers having left "to fight the Russians." And then, one morning, Billy and the other prisoners "got up to discover that the door was unlocked. World War Two was over" (215). The prisoners re-enter the world, the trees begin to leaf out, and the empty coffin-shaped wagon seems only a prop from a concluded performance. The stage has been emptied and at the very end begins to fill again.

The question of whether or not this ending is hopeful or cynically deterministic is irrelevant; Vonnegut's point is that the world cannot be stopped, that it continues on no matter what man may or may not do. The ending of World War Two is only one frame in a Tralfamadorian perspective of the human race. As Vonnegut would say, "So it goes."

NOTES

[1] W. D. McGinnis, "Arbitrary Cycle of *Slaughterhouse-Five:* A Relation of Form to Theme," *Critique,* 17 (1975), p. 65.

[2] R. Giannone, "Violence in the Fiction of Kurt Vonnegut," *Thought,* 56 (1981), p. 67.

[4] E. Grossman, "Vonnegut and His Audience," *Commentary*, 58 (1974), p. 44.

[5] P. B. Messent, "*Breakfast of Champions:* the Direction of Kurt Vonnegut's Fiction," *Journal of American Studies*, 8 (1974), pp. 110-11.

[6] J. R. May, "Vonnegut's Humor and the Limits of Hope," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 18 (1972), p. 29.

[7] McGinnis, p. 67.

[8] This and all subsequent references to the text pertain to *Slaughterhouse-Five* (Dell Books: New York, 1968). The reference to Lot's wife occurs on pages 21 and 22.

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The Troubled Adolescent: Teaching Judith Guest's *Ordinary People*

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We see it in headlines: "Teen Suicides Rock Texas Town." We see it on television screens: "Hear Me Cry" and "Silence of the Heart." Teenage suicides have grown to frightening proportions. According to a recent study, the suicide rate of those fifteen to twenty-four years of age has tripled in the last thirty years; at least thirteen children take their own lives each day. If we, as teachers of literature, feel a responsibility to deal with relevant social issues, then we are obligated to address ourselves and our students

to this one. Judith Guest has given us a fine novel which allows us to explore with students this grim problem of teen suicide and its searing effects on family and friends.

Ordinary People (N.Y., Ballantine Books, 1980) presents a protagonist, Conrad Jarrett, who has made an unsuccessful attempt on his own life. We meet him shortly after his return from an eight-month stay in a psychiatric hospital; he is trying to piece together the fragments of his life. In the novel he struggles to come to terms with himself, with his family, and with his peers. Returning to Lake Forest High School to repeat his junior year, he progresses, often stumbling, from a guilt-ridden, tormented boy to a young man who has gained considerable control of the directions of his life. We are aware that his struggle has not ended, but we also know that Conrad Jarrett is going to make it.

At the beginning Conrad needs "a reason to get up in the morning" (p. 1) but the details of the morning ritual overwhelm him and "the small seed of despair cracks open and sends experimental tendrils upward to the fragile skin of calm holding him together" (p. 2). When he left the hospital, he had felt that there were guiding principles for getting his life in order, but "the details have somehow been lost. If there ever were any" (p. 5). He tells himself that his "sense of identity seems to have been misplaced. No. Wrong. You don't lose what you never had" (p. 15). He tells Dr. Berger that he'd "like to be more in control" (p. 39) and begins to look forward to his visits with Berger because each one is "a chance to feel better twice a week" (p. 52) although he is not yet aware of any carryover. At night Conrad cannot sleep until "he has reviewed the day, counted up his losses. He must learn more control" (p. 69). But Conrad does make progress. Remembering a skiing incident with his brother Buck, now dead in an accident for which Conrad blames himself, he waits "for the familiar arrow of pain. Only there is none. . . . It is a first" (p. 96). And so Conrad begins to move forward to recovery and acceptance of himself.

With his parents Conrad is cautious, tentative. His father Cal is a tender, sensitive man who feels responsible for his son's attempt at suicide and is overly solicitous of his son. He, too, is floundering: "I'm the kind of man who — hasn't the least idea what kind of man I am" (p. 47). But he desperately wants to believe that "Things do seem better, more relaxed, just since Thanksgiving" (p. 85). He grows more concerned, however, at his wife's and Conrad's inability to talk about what has happened and is happening in their lives; they are, after all, "ordinary people . . . for a

time they had entered the world of the newspaper statistic . . . but that was over" (p. 87). At the same time, he feels a widening gulf between Beth and himself, and he is "obscurely frightened" (p. 132). He sees his wife and son as too much alike; for both, "all healing is done from outside in" (p. 115). We see, however, that Beth is far more private than Conrad. Unable to accept Cal's concern for Conrad and refusing to respond to her son's need of her, she leaves them. Outside, Beth gives the appearance of control and order, but inside "is not order but chaos" (p. 235). Conrad tells Berger helplessly that "my mother and I do not connect" (p. 90). By the novel's conclusion, Cal and Conrad have established a sound relationship, and Conrad vows that, when his mother returns from abroad, he will "see her . . . nothing important . . . because she knows it all, knows just as he does that it is love . . . that keeps them apart, even as it holds them somehow together" (p. 245).

Conrad's caution extends to his relationships with friends from "before." Lazenby, his closest friend, is puzzled and then angered by Conrad's seeming aloofness. Conrad's attempt to re-establish contact with Karen, another patient at the hospital, is rebuffed, and he is set back considerably when he learns that she has killed herself. He is drawn to a new girl in school, Jeannine, but he realizes he has never really had a date. They begin a tentative relationship; he begins to feel "so strong, so needed" (p. 185) and, when their love is consummated, "he is in touch for good, with hope, with himself, no matter what" (p. 232). The novel ends with Lazenby and Conrad going off to play golf, their friendship renewed and strengthened.

Conrad Jarret is a protagonist with whom students can identify. His problems with school work, sports, sexuality, and priorities are the problems of all teens. His isolation, while stemming primarily from his attemped suicide, is treated in such a way that students understand him. At Evanston we use the novel with seniors and find it one of the most popular titles. Why? The setting is the North Shore, and the novel's close finds Conrad enrolling at Evanston Township to complete his schooling. But the novel also has something to say to them, aside from the setting.

I begin this work with a full period discussion of teenage suicide. I ask students about preconceived notions they have about the topic. Some of them may well have had experience, either through friends or hearsay, that they are eager to talk about. We discuss the myths:

People who talk about suicide don't commit suicide.
Suicide happens without warning.
Suicidal people are fully intent on dying.

Once a person is suicidal, s/he is suicidal forever.
Improvement following a suicidal crisis means the risk is over.
Suicide strikes much more often among the rich.
Suicide occurs almost exclusively among the poor.
Suicide is inherited or "runs in the family."
All suicidal individuals are mentally ill, and suicide always is the act of a psychotic person.

We then discuss the truths:

Of any ten persons who kill themselves, eight have given definite warnings of their intentions.
Studies reveal that the suicidal person gives many clues and warnings regarding the intention.
Most suicidal people are undecided about living or dying, and they "gamble with death," leaving it to others to save them.
Persons who wish to kill themselves are "suicidal" for only a limited period of time.
Most suicides occur within about three months following the beginning of "improvement," when the individual has the energy to put morbid thoughts and feelings into effect.
Suicide is neither the rich man's disease nor the poor man's curse. The act is represented proportionately among all levels of society.
Suicide does not run in families. It is an individual pattern.
Studies of hundreds of genuine suicide notes indicate that, although the person is unhappy, s/he is not necessarily mentally ill.

This initial discussion serves as a good introduction to the study of *Ordinary People*. Students begin their reading reminded anew that forces both from within and without affect adolescent behavior, that parents and other adults are too frequently unaware of motivations for adolescent behavior, and that reaction to peer pressure can influence adolescent decisions.

Peas, Honey, and Eudora Welty

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CARBONDALE

I eat my peas with honey;
I've done so all my life.
It makes the peas taste funny,
But it keeps them on my knife.

So recited fourteen frightened little Brownie Scouts, during part of their annual Christmas program at the Old Folks Home, in order to satisfy their yearly social service obligation. After several quavering rounds of "Jingle Bells," the little girls — glad to escape the outstretched, gnarled hands, the whiney voices, the pleading eyes, the musty smells — edged toward the door as the Matron-in-Charge thanked them for entertaining the "dear, dear grandmas and grandpas," and invited the girls to return on a regular basis. Never again, I thought, as I helped the silent, white-faced little ones into their coats for the ride home. As a newly drafted assistant to the Brownie Scout leader, I was in no position to criticize, having had no hand in the planning, but it seemed obvious to me that our visit of "charity" had all the marks of a traumatic experience, an experience no doubt duplicated endless times in endless places by endless numbers of youngsters. Partially as a result of this unfortunate episode, my career as a Scout assistant was short-lived, but the lesson I learned was not. In life (and in teaching literature I was to discover) plans had better be well-laid; to promote optimum learning, lots of different plans had better be well-made.

Intent upon finding successful ways to present the various genres, I turned in my teaching to recognized "approaches," as defined in texts such as *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* by Wilfred L. Guerin, et al. (NY: Harper and Row, 1966) which promised "to the uninitiated student the critical tools that have come to be regarded as indispensable for the sensitive reader . . ." (p. xii). Determined to make my students "sensitive" readers (rather than just assigning pages to be read), I tried every approach (textual-linguistic, historical-biographical, moral-philosophical, mythological and archetypal, etc.), half-fearing that I would leave something undone or unsaid about a particular poem, novel, or short story. Still, something was missing.

Then one day I read Eudora Welty's "The Reading and Writing of Short Stories," originally published in the *Atlantic Monthly* (February and March, 1949). Not denying "the powers of achievements of good criticism," Welty urges that we as readers "look at some short stories as writers of stories ourselves and people who like them; let's see a little how they are disposed, watch them in their notions and enjoy them." She continues,

> We would be sure of this [seeking understanding by way of pleasure], I believe, if we asked ourselves, how would we wish a story of our own to be understood? By way of delight — by its being purely read, for the first fresh impact and the wonder attached; isn't this the honest answer? It seems to me too

> that almost the first hope we ever had, when we gave someone a story all fresh and new, was that the story would *read new*. And that's how we should read.
>
> What bliss! Think how often this is denied us. That's why we think of childhood books so lovingly. But hasn't every writer the rightful wish to have his story so read? By reading secondhandedly, or obediently as taught, or by approaching a story without an open mind, we wrong its very first attribute — its uniqueness, with its sister attribute of freshness. We are getting to be old, jaded readers — instructed, advised readers, victims of summaries and textbooks; ... While we read and while we write, let's forget what we're being forever told and find the fresh world again — of enjoyment and pleasure and the story unspoiled, delighted in or hated for its own sake. (Reprinted in *What is the Short Story?* by Eugene Current-Garcia and Walton R. Patrick, Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1961, pp. 108-116.)

So that was it! I had been paying so much attention to the "how" of stories (the peas?) that I had forgotten "the story unspoiled." Setting up situations, then, in which stories could be enjoyed (the honey?) became my goal. Not unsurprisingly, perhaps, Ms. Welty's own stories provide superb examples with which to work. "Seeking understanding by way of pleasure," I have presented "A Visit of Charity" (shades of an unforgettable experience!) and "A Worn Path," two frequently anthologized examples of Welty's work, for my students' ***enjoyment***.

In brief, "A Visit of Charity" focuses on fourteen-year-old Marian, a Campfire Girl, who visits the Old Ladies' Home in order to earn "points." A nurse escorts her to a room where two old ladies — one bird-like and the other sheep-like — terrify Marian by their behavior ("Marian was trembling, and her heart nearly stopped beating altogether for a moment."). Finally she escapes the clutches of the bird-like woman, dashes past the nurse without responding to her invitation to stay for dinner, and pushes out the door to freedom. Boarding the bus which will carry her away from her nightmarish experience, she takes a big bite out of the apple she has just retrieved from its hiding place outside the Home. In an interesting opposition, old Phoenix Jackson — significantly bird-like — trudges down the old Natchez Trace in "A Worn Path" on her way to secure medicine for her ailing grandson. Encountering obstacles as she goes — including a hunter who drops a nickel which she retrieves, Phoenix finally arrives at the charity clinic. There, a nurse treats her abruptly, but an attendant offers her a few pennies. After all it *is* Christmas. With the two nickels she has accumulated, Phoenix plans to go "to the store and buy my child a little wind-mill they sells, made out of

paper. He going to find it hard to believe there such a thing in the world." Then she nods, walks out of the office, and slowly leaves.

As a pre-reading activity for these two stories, with no desire to simply recreate a traumatic experience but to tap a fairly common episode in their lives, I usually ask students to describe in writing a visit to a nursing home, to an elderly relative's house, or to a hospital/clinic. In particular, they are asked to tell why they went; to *show* what they saw, heard, smelled; to describe people they met; and to indicate how they felt on leaving. The results, shared orally, are vivid recollections of much the same atmosphere found in "A Visit of Charity": the cold clamminess, the smell "like the interior of a clock," the clutching claw-like hands, and the feeling of release after being "caught in a robbers' cave, just before one was murdered." On occasion I have tried this activity only orally, putting descriptive phrases on the board as students volunteer their recollections, but the quality of the responses has always been better if they have had time to reminisce on their own and have written down what they recall before class begins. In either case, however, students come together in a moment of shared experience which sets the stage for their reading of "A Visit of Charity." Only eleven pages long in *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories* (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1936) in which it first appeared, the story itself is best read immediately after sharing similar experiences — and read without comment. I try to allow plenty of time in class for this; almost always students choose to read it the second time both because they come to identify with Marian and/or with the poor old ladies.

As a follow-up to the story, I ask for questions *from* students rather than asking questions *of* them. Usually other students provide satisfying answers; if they do not, I may write the question on the board — putting it "on reserve," so to speak, until "answers" emerge of their own accord later (only infrequently aided by a little help from a friend — me). As another follow-up, I sometimes ask students to write an interior monolog from the point of view of one of the old ladies, beginning with Marian's entrance into the room; or from the nurse's point of view as *she* views both Marian and the old ladies. Always I read I Corinthians 13 ("And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."), both as food for thought regarding "A Visit . . ." and as a springboard into "A Worn Path."

It, too, is short (only fourteen pages in the edition mentioned above) and is best read in class. With "A Visit of Charity" in

their minds, this story is read in a far different context than it is in isolation. Of the two, it is the more difficult, probably because the focus is old Phoenix whose mission is one of true charity. My only directions before students read are these, borrowed from Barbara Pannwitt's marvelous text, *The Art of Short Fiction* (Boston: Ginn, 1964) many years ago:

1. Read for pleasure. Get to know the characters as people, responding favorably or unfavorably to them, fearing for them, enjoying their success, sympathizing with their defeats, approving or disapproving of their actions.
2. Notice what is happening and try to remember as many of the details as possible.
3. Inhabit the world of the story, where and when it is taking place (both physically and psychologically), and adapt to its atmosphere and timing.
4. Look at your own attitudes and expectations. Consider how you *feel* about the story.
5. Consider what is the important impression you have received. It may or may not be what the author hoped it would be, but it is your right to determine it on the basis of the evidence. (p. 20-21)

Pannwitt's suggestions are echoed by Welty in her newly published autobiography, *One Writer's Beginnings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984). In it she reminds us that "learning stamps you with its moments. Childhood's learning is made up of moments. It isn't steady. It's a pulse" (p. 9); and she makes us recall that the "frame" through which we view the world changes, in her case from scene to situation to implication to the greatest of all these, "a single, entire human being, who will never be confined in any frame" (p. 90). Having the "right to determine" how they feel about "A Worn Path," students read from the *inside*, inside old Phoenix as she travels a path they have never trod, in their own way unconfined.

As a final follow-up of the two stories, I usually ask for questions from the students again. By this time, they are able to point out differences and similarities, and discuss with some insight the usual elements — mood, imagery, point of view, irony, setting, characterization — so dear to English teachers' hearts. Short and long papers, sometimes introduced by a shortened version of the first pre-reading activity, often result. Best of all, many students are led to other works by Eudora Welty, a versatile artist who captures the essence of an experience, feeling comfortable as they read other stories "unspoiled."

Setting up a reading situation helps students take an "inward journey," as Ms. Welty points out, "that leads us through time — forward or back, seldom in a straight line, most often spiraling. Each of us is moving, changing, with respect to others. As we discover, we remember; remembering, we discover; and most intensely do we experience this when our separate journeys converge. Our living experience at those meeting points is one of the charged dramatic fields of fiction" (*One Writer's Beginnings*, p. 102). And that's what I aim for, a charged dramatic field, as we read freshly.

Teaching the Elements of Fiction Using an Adolescent Novel: *Halfway Down Paddy Lane*

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What do secondary teachers look for in a novel to use with their classes? Let's start with enjoyment, because students must stay awake to get any other benefits. Let's add high quality, since teachers, by their selection of literature, contribute to their student's acquisition of good taste. We should mention the novel's potential for fruitful analysis in literary terms, since we want our students to apply to their later reading what they learn in class. In addition, we would like our students to confront their own assumptions and to clarify their thinking concerning some of the issues involved in maturing. If the novel has something special as well, so much the better.

From all these points of view, *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* by Jean Marzollo has much to recommend it. It is a young adult novel strong enough to bear the kind of close scrutiny that sophisticated readers bring to serious literature. Not only is it pedagogically valuable, but it is also a pleasure to read. Secondary students can understand it easily as a story, and for this reason teachers would have no need to explain the plot and could instead concentrate on teaching how to analyze fiction. *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* would thus be an appropriate first novel in a secondary English or reading course.

When youngsters begin to read, they enjoy a good story for its own sake. As they advance in skill, beginning in the later grades of elementary school, they enjoy it further for its known and analyzed strengths of plot and character development, the kind of strengths we will look at first. Finally, with further advancement, which should begin no later than high school, readers will enjoy the story beyond all these things for its artistry and its insight into the human condition.

Since librarians and teachers of English and reading at the secondary level assist young readers from one stage to another, we will discuss *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* in relation to certain elements of fiction. The aim will be to consider the teaching of all stories by looking at one particular novel in which selected elements furnish a convenient means of analysis. There will be no attempt, however, to mention every conceivable literary term or to be exhaustive in applying each one mentioned. At suitable points in the discussion, practical suggestions will be made for teaching fiction.

The elementary reading level

An obvious starting point in looking at a novel is the *plot,* which to beginning readers is merely what happens. Here is a sketch of the plot of *Halfway Down Paddy Lane.*

> In 1981, fifteen-year-old Kate went to sleep in the old house her antique-loving mother was renovating to sell. She woke up in the same house in 1850 as a member of the family of her great-great-great-great-grandmother O'Hara. Apparently she had taken the place of her ancestor, an aunt who was fifteen at the time and also named Kate. The two Kates resembled each other enough that almost nobody suspected their situation, but the modern-day Kate (the only one whose story is told) faced one challenge after another to act natural and thus avoid being accused of having "brain fever" — a condition that might have led her to be "chained up in a barn like [Old Man Flynn]" and "fed with the pigs" (p. 16, *Halfway Down Paddy Lane,* by Jean Marzollo [New York: Dial Press, 1981]; all references will be to this edition).
>
> In this world of poverty-stricken Irish mill workers, Kate was stretched rapidly into a maturity that was never demanded by her twentieth-century life. Within a few short but intense weeks, she was forced into enough daunting and thrilling experiences to last a lifetime: working in a mill, rescuing someone in a fire, standing guard with a gun, losing a mother (the older Kate's), falling in love, advancing in sexual expression, planning a marriage, taking over the domestic responsibilities in her new household, running away on her own without even her substi-

> tute family to support her financially or emotionally, and watching her intended husband stand up in marriage to someone else.

Phew! With all that action, there's no excuse for any student to become bored.

The intermediate reading level

In addition to having a whirlwind series of events, this novel can boast an admirable combination of other appeals. Analyzing these appeals would help secondary readers to enjoy this novel, and it would also encourage them to seek such pleasures in their other reading.

Though some young readers have a clear idea of the *types of fiction* available to them, others would profit from being told the conventions of a standard classification, especially if it were applied to a work of fiction being studied in class. Take, for example, the question of whether or not *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* is a *mystery story*. It does open with some features of the mystery, and it is one of the most confounding imaginable: How did Kate get back in time? Who were the people? What was going on? Throughout the book she had frequent occasion to wonder about the surpassingly strange circumstances, but the mystery was never explained. Perhaps Marzollo preferred to concentrate on the story itself, and almost certainly it would have been difficult to explain time travel in a way that would seem consistent with the basically realistic treatment of the rest of the novel. Kate's efforts had to go into coping with her new life more than into seeking an answer that almost surely would never be provided. But this novel is not primarily a mystery for the characters to solve. Students must learn that classification should not be applied mindlessly.

Concerning most other types of plots for fiction, *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* does not really fit them, either. A reference to the Wild West and Indians (p. 146) does not make the novel a *western*. Kate's being transported back in time qualifies as an event beyond the natural, but it does not determine the novel to be either *science fiction* or a *supernatural thriller*. And it cannot be *fantasy* because of its realism in virtually every respect except time travel. A love affair between Kate and Patrick does not mean that the story is chiefly a *romance*. Nor is the novel a *modern adventure* (modern at the time it was written).

The type of story that is most directly illustrated by *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* is *historical fiction*. The novel is pervaded with actual or invented people and authentic food, clothing, houses,

transportation, events, religion, values — in short, the times personified and activated as no history book could present them. The information is integrated into the lives of characters typical of the time and place. Readers can learn by inference a lot about what it was like to be alive in such a situation, because the imagination of each reader meets the imagination of the author and is enhanced by the meeting. (Consideration of *imagination* will continue in the next section of this article.)

Like the writers of most historical fiction, Marzollo includes some references to processes and activities of the period that entertain and inform for their own sake as well as set the scene and advance the plot. Limiting herself to the relatively small scale of the young adult novel, she gives information about how people managed to use the machines of a century ago in the cotton mill. She also details how to wash dishes, to dress, and to tend to sanitation during menstrual periods. As Marzollo depicts Kate struggling to learn about each feature of the historical place and time, students can painlessly learn it, too.

The appeal of the plot of *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* owes much to its skillful exploitation of *conflict*. Unsophisticated students find it useful to recognize four general types of conflict as the bases on which a story is built: person against society, person against person, person against nature, and person against self. It is a measure both of Marzollo's skill as a writer and of the depth of her heroine's dilemma that Kate could be said to have some degree of conflict with everything about her breathtaking new life. It is easy and profitable for students to list these conflicts.

First, the society into which she was thrust provided the religious antecedent for her own lukewarm attachment to the Roman Catholic Church, and she was suddenly placed in a position in which "she had prayed more in that one day [her first in 1850] than she had ever prayed in her life" (p. 57). She was angry at the conditions in which adults and especially children were forced to work, and she could hardly comprehend the bigotry and hatred between the Irish immigrants and the "Yankees" who also resided in the town, a feeling based on competition for jobs as well as religious and ethnic considerations. Rather than starve in Ireland, the new Americans would work themselves literally to death in the New World, though they received so little in wages that work was almost all they had time to do.

Not only was school not required of all children; it was normally not available to the poor. Kate, therefore, would be suspected of being bewitched if she revealed that she could read. She showed

herself to be out of step in other ways as well, such as not being intimidated by the owner of the cotton mill, by speaking up in behalf of the hated Yankee Jed Barlow when he was threatened by an Irish mob, and by planning to set up unions to protect poor Irish mill girls in Lowell.

Kate was also in conflict with nature. She could hardly reconcile herself to her new situation in the nineteenth century, and she rebelled against whatever had taken her away from her comfortable home and parents and school. More important, she resented the conditions of the time, the unavoidable and impersonal forces which always have much to do with shaping individuals as well as institutions. For example, Kate could scarcely bear having to walk around horse droppings on the dirt road, because she had grown up with a greatly different standard of sanitation. She hated the flies blowing around Patrick's wound, and the standard food repulsed her. Multiplied many times, this discontinuity between Kate and her total living condition resulted in much conflict.

At one time or another, Kate found herself striving against many individuals. She did not share her new mother's views and values on some things, though she was forced to respect Mother O'Hara. She vied with Nora to win the chief place in Patrick's affections. In her naiveté, she twice ran afoul of Jed Barlow. Although she masked her feelings most of the time, she also stepped out of her appropriate nineteenth-century place in dealing with her mill foreman, Mr. Harris. And she was obliged to watch herself with Patrick lest she alienate the one person she felt she could trust with her secret identity.

Finally, Kate was at times in conflict with herself. She wanted to return home, but she was strongly attracted to Patrick. She resisted the adjustment that would be necessary if she should be unable to return to her own time, but simultaneously she took steps to assure her survival and best interests. She wanted to speak her mind, but she was almost always tense from squelching her words in order to remain acceptable to others. Late in the story she learned that she could not have Patrick; so she blindly left behind everything that had meaning to her in this new century. When she ran away to Lowell, she temporarily lost all sense of what she even wanted. Eventually she arrived at a new view of what she could do in 1850: become an organizer for unions for girls working in the cotton mills. Even then, she was torn between wanting to get on with her life without Patrick and wanting to return to him if only to see him marry Nora.

The secondary student is likely to notice characters independently in terms of liking or disliking them but to need instruction in analyzing *characterization*. Young adults will like Kate, since she is similar to them in age and in other ways, and since she is heroic at the same time she seems believably human.

Students should know that authors typically use both *round* and *flat* characters. A round (or three-dimensional) character like Kate is complex enough to be shown from numerous angles, possessed of both strengths and weaknesses, and capable of momentarily surprising a reader in ways that turn out to be not only acceptable but, come to think of it, inevitable. Especially in a short novel, there is little chance of a second fully-developed major character or else the focus would become diffused. So the flat characters, who possess only one or a few specific qualities, fill out the background and contribute *complexity* by their interrelations among each other and with the main character. Supporting characters, by having one or more individualizing traits, can avoid being pure *types*. A *dynamic* character like Kate changes, especially by growing, during the story; *static* characters remain essentially unchanged, though they might reveal more and more of themselves as the story progresses, as Patrick does.

All the characters in *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* behave believably with respect to both their established personalities and their historical perspective. The Irish *diction* is persuasively but unobtrusively conveyed, and it contributes to development of character, of history, of theme, and of stylistic flavor. The subordinate characters are appropriate in their number and kind of dealings with Kate, who dominates the story and gives it focus. Her character is smoothly developed as the plot unfolds, and the interaction of her total personality with her circumstances drives the action of the plot.

This interdependence of plot and characterization, in which readers learn about both personality and events, is one aspect of *unity*. Events in a story should not merely repeat what the reader already knows but instead should reveal additional features of the characters. In turn, characterization must be revealed in physical or mental activity that springs from personal traits which are consistent (i.e., not "out of character") with whatever the reader has already learned.

Students need to be aware that authors typically use several methods of letting readers know what kind of characters the story has. At one point or another, most authors speak explicitly about the kind of person a character is. This *direct characterization*

efficiently conveys a lot of information fast, but by itself it cannot move a reader so powerfully as good *indirect characterization* can. Four methods of indirect characterization are the physical description of the character, the actions of the character, the words and thoughts of the character, and the reactions and opinions of other characters. Like most skillful authors, especially in contemporary fiction, Marzollo limits the use of direct characterization and combines it with brief description, individual action, conversation and internal monolog, and interaction between characters.

In addition to plot and character, young readers are most likely to take note of *details* and *overall effect* or *tone*. Examined in these terms, *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* is up to date in both. Contemporary fiction is likely to be *realistic*, since it deals with lower class people experiencing grimy problems and speaking in slang or four-letter words. Marzollo is realistic in this sense; however, along with other recent writers of young adult fiction, she includes a *romantic* feature: Kate occasionally swears, blunders, and has natural body functions, but she manages to meet challenges that would defeat anybody but a true heroine.

There are many other ways in which *Hafway Down Paddy Lane* displays its realism. For instance, unpleasant death is no longer taboo in children's fiction. Mother O'Hara died, and not sublimely like a romantic character; she perished wretchedly, though with dignity, in a fire set by the Yankees in the newly erected Irish church. Another realistic feature of young adult fiction is the explicit concern with bodily functions and maturing sexuality. Both of these are apparent in Kate, who appreciated the way the old-fashioned dresses enhanced her figure, who could hardly bear doing without tampons, and whose love scene with Patrick include several explicit details — specifics that contribute to Marzollo's plot, characterizations, and theme, rather than as detached images designed to titillate or shock.

The intermediate-advanced reading level

Mature readers demand that the elements of fiction be handled with skill. In order to evaluate whether the writing is skillful, readers must know which elements to examine and which questions to ask about these elements. Two promising questions are as follows:

1. Compared to writers known to be good, how did a certain author handle the various elements under consideration?

2. Considering the alternatives obviously available, how well did the author make choices in handling the features being examined?

Let's apply these questions to a tiny but important feature of fiction, the *title*. It's worth asking the class, Does *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* refer to rice paddies? Is "halfway" significant in contrast to "all the way"? Does "lane" suggest a story that takes place at the edge of a small town? These are questions that most readers (young and old) would be unlikely to dwell on, but they are worth pursuing when a novel is being used for studying as well as pleasure. Mature readers might not be consciously aware of why they selected a particular book to read, but the title is certainly one basis. It is important to state that no title can stretch more than a few words long, and it should not be expected to give a plot summary or do all the work of reaching out to force a reader to pick up the book. It is enough for the title to stimulate interest by any means it can. Marzollo has chosen a title that becomes significant to readers as they read, especially by the end of the story.

Using the two questions above, we might believe that her title is less irresistible than, say, *If I Love You, Am I Trapped Forever?*, with its question form, its raising of a problem, and its connection with love, one of the all-time high-interest subjects of literature, for adults as well as adolescents. Let's look at the titles of a few other books that secondary students might encounter. *The Shelter Trap* offers the pleasure of a literary device called an *oxymoron*. *The Sports Medicine Book* leaves no doubt about its contents. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* profits from the familiar words from a game and the traditional nursery rime. *The Naked and the Dead* boasts sensationalism together with a morbidly intriguing juxtaposition. On the other hand, some titles give limited information and generate little interest in themselves: *North Town, Rebecca, Dove*. Students are much more likely to know how to respond to the title *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* if it is seen in a collection of comparable and contrasting titles.

A useful and enjoyable reading-readiness exercise in *comparative analysis* would be to show ten or twelve titles and ask students to write their responses to them. A follow-up question would be for the students to rank the titles in the order in which they would want to read the books, and to tell why. Class discussion would then focus on authors and choices, and on the consequences of a writer's making certain kinds of choices.

It is beyond our scope at the moment to provide the names of specific novels to use in comparison to *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* for every element of fiction we mention. But it should be noted that such comparisons are well worth making throughout a course. (Any fiction being taught in the course ought to be suitable.) Only by seeing and using the same tools of analysis over and over will young readers develop skill in the employment of them. Our goal is to lead students to read analytically by habit, and they will analyze habitually only if they are given a lot of guided practice through the years of secondary school (and beyond).

Asking for "responses," incidentally, shows excellent promise of giving the students not only an occasion to write but also a reason to think, since what they write and how they express themselves will both become part of the immediately ensuing class discussion. In addition, "responses" permit a teacher to spot which students are quiet but thoughtful, which ones are not participating in any meaningful sense, and which ones need specific kinds of help and encouragement (a diagnostic device that bears on lesson planning) — all this without collecting a full set of five-paragraph essays, which though valuable for many reasons cannot be assigned or graded nearly so often as "responses" can be. Furthermore, "responses" are almost as quick to read as most other short-answer quizzes; and they are much more likely to stimulate interest, and therefore effort, on the part of students than are tests that do only police work.

The second of the two questions could be used after the students had finished the book. It might be worded this way: "If you had written the novel about Kate, name three titles you might've given it." This exercise, like the first one, would encourage the students to assume something of the role of the author. It would also promote their getting the main thrust of the novel, and it would assure that they understand that a "real writer" does not usually settle for the first version composed. If they are asked also to select one of their titles as the best and to tell why, all the better. Third, they could be asked why Marzollo might have used the title as published. Finally, they could form small groups and compare titles and thinking, with the favorites being presented to the whole class.

Another feature of the plot is the *opening*. Ideally, it should (a) catch the readers' interest and (b) propel them into the action. Notice how Marzollo handles this crucial business.

> Kate didn't turn or open her eyes. It was as if only her mind had awakened. Something's changed, she thought. Something's wrong (p. 3).

Once again, before the students have had a chance to read the novel, this quotation could be duplicated or written on the chalkboard (rather than read aloud, to prevent adding the effects of the voice); and students could be asked to write their responses to it. In this case, they should also be asked what they know of the story so far. We would hope that collectively they notice that readers are being introduced to Kate, who turns out to be the main character; that she has been unconscious or asleep; and that there is a problem. By next having the students write their anticipation of what might happen in just the following paragraph (not the whole book), we continue our emphasis on asking students to stretch in ways that psychologists have talked about: mature readers must participate in *imaginatively* "rewriting" the book; and this can be done only after they have been taught something about the specific features of the writer's task. By no means are we hoping that the students will actually predict what Marzollo herself wrote. Instead, we are introducing *participatory reading*, or *active* (as opposed to *passive*) *reading*. Some of the students' responses would be read aloud, not for a letter grade but for everyone to see how Marzollo, in four short sentences, has set up a story that goes somewhere. The "somewhere" is indeterminant so far, but with each succeeding sentence she narrows the possibilities, until the very story that she has in mind begins to emerge.

In the second paragraph, for example, Marzollo eliminates the possibility that Kate was falling down a cliff, that she was hurtling through space in a rocket, that she was lying in a forest or on a beach. The setting begins to establish itself unobtrusively. Kate was in a strange room. By this point, the mature reader is also thinking about the *tone*, or at least responding to it unconsciously. (Students learn that a lot of our response is unconscious, but it becomes conscious as we search for it. And much of the pleasure of reading comes from this analytical self-examination.) Speaking of the strange room, the author writes in behalf of her character Kate, "No one knew she lived in a place like this." In other words, Kate was reflecting on her experience, a key element of the tone of the passage. It is also central to the characterization of Kate, whose generally level-headed analysis of any situation permitted her to make the best of it. This impression is borne out by the opening of the third paragraph: "Cautiously Kate opened her eyes further, looking around the room for clues that would explain the feeling she had. . . ." What a good role model for readers to adopt — the person who examines, who hunts for answers, and who bases these answers on the result of research conducted

thoughtfully. We would love to have our classes full of Kates. (Maybe we can develop some.)

We can already get the impression that the story will be told from the stance of a narrator who can read the thoughts as well as tell the actions of at least one character. So we can talk with the students about the *omniscient point of view.* Later, as we get further into the novel and consider the treatment of other characters, we will mention the characteristics of Marzollo's more specific stance, the *limited omniscient* point of view. The story, in other words, will consist only of what Kate sees, hears, learns, or thinks and feels internally, so Marzollo must not mention anything about the other characters that is not available to Kate. The effect of this limitation is to require some ingenuity on Marzollo's part: to contrive to have Kate present at any scene critical to the action, or else to have such a scene reported to Kate. The contriving, however, must not sound contrived.

In this novel, the restriction imposed by this point of view is more than compensated for, because Marzollo does possess the requisite ingenuity and, most of all, because of the positive advantages available to an author choosing the limited omniscient point of view. Contrary to popular belief, it is not only the *first person* point of view that provides intimacy; the limited omniscient can convey almost the same intimacy as first person. Moreover, limited omniscience avoids the typical problems of first person: the character who is not self-aware enough to produce the insights which the author wants to have stated; the character who is truly virtuous or beautiful or smart but who sounds like a braggart for saying so; the character who is interesting enough to occupy a good deal of space in the book but whose inescapable voice grows tiresome before the book is done. In addition, the first person narrator must always have someone around to talk with, or write to; and many things that sound natural when told about someone would sound strained when spoken or written in a letter or diary.

Not only does Marzollo avoid problems by her choice of point of view; she also gains certain benefits. For one thing, adolescent literature features a small cast of characters, and with limited omniscience she is spared the necessity of probing the thoughts and actions of the secondary characters too deeply. For another, adolescent books are usually shorter than adult books, and Marzollo must not overextend herself in her short volume (178 pages counting the title page) by trying to do too much. As important as any other consideration is the decision Marzollo made to keep her

heroine under pressure for the entire novel, and to pass along to the reader that vicarious pressure by focusing on Kate's observations, and internal responses. This does not mean that we see only what Kate did on a desert island; she was involved constantly, until the very end, with other people, and even then they occupied her thoughts. Instead, it means that everything we learn of other people and events is mediated through her perception. It also means that readers respond to events, characters, and the historical circumstances themselves in terms defined by Kate.

Earlier in our discussion, many references were implied concerning the *setting* of *Halfway Down Paddy Lane*, so it will not be necessary to repeat them here. Suffice it to say that it too is an important element of fiction, especially of historical fiction. Students need to learn that setting is more complex than a mere geographic spot on the map or a date on the calendar. It involves the whole milieu, the social and cultural scene; and it brings a relentless force to bear on all the characters, especially on a girl brought from another time and place and milieu (i.e., from another setting). It pitted Kate against society, bringing about internal conflict, and giving rise to innumerable plot details and twists. Marzollo establishes her setting with admirable swiftness and economy by utilizing her limited omniscient point of view and by dropping her heroine into the story without giving tedious pages of *exposition* (background). Kate barely had time to dress in the old-fashioned clothes she found in the room before Patrick called her downstairs. In a pleasing variation on the typical fiction in which the heroine is dreaming the story, Marzollo has Kate suppose she was dreaming and thus to play along with the supposed dream, thereby gaining time in which to learn enough about her circumstances to avoid being accused of having brain fever. The essential facts about Kate's background are brought into the story smoothly and functionally, helping to develop one of the novel's themes, the comparison of past and present.

At any point of significance in the novel, and in conjunction with the teacher's purposes, any scene or passage can be ***explicated*** in class or as assigned. Students tend to become accomplished at making the most of clues provided by skillful authors for the enjoyment of skillful readers. Not surprisingly, they like the sense of accomplishment.

The advanced reading level

Taken merely on the surface level as a rip-roaring story (the most rudimentary level, which would be a respectable component

of the appeal at any age), *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* is an unqualified success. Examined for its consistency of plot and depth of characterization (an intermediate stage, which includes the previous one at the same time it becomes more sophisticated), the novel is seamless and its characters are vivid. Marzollo's achievement is all the more impressive since it fits the smaller scope of writing for young people.

But what does Marzollo offer to readers at the most comprehensive stage of aesthetic and thematic appreciation, the stage that encompasses the other appreciations mentioned? In contrast to novels of shallow preaching, melodrama, and exploitation, *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* reveals its beauties and insights to those who know how to look for them but does not allow them to intrude on the telling of a gripping and structurally sound story. We have been mentioning the artistry that had to go into the making of many decisions, but so far we have insufficiently praised the *unity*, the harmony of the various elements. The plot fits nicely with the setting, the characterization is developed in relation to both of them, the point of view is appropriate for the three of them, and the tone is suitable for all four. The *language* or *diction* of modern teenagers, of nineteenth-century Irish immigrants, and of the authorial voice blend with the other elements. The themes are inseparable from the story itself, and in fact Marzollo has left them implicit except as they advance the characterization and the movement of events. There are no separate clouds of thematic gas.

Teaching *theme* can be tricky. Students need to be taught to derive their idea of the author's theme directly from the text and then to support that idea solidly with references to it. Doing so will minimize two kinds of pointless and unresolvable arguments: "You're just reading that interpretation into the book," and "I don't care how many people disagree — here's what the book meant to me."

By formulating a tentative statement of the theme as they read, students have a basis for interpreting (not merely moving superficially past) each major feature and event of the story. As the story unfolds, mature readers continually revise their statement as necessary to accommodate each important detail. Students should learn that authors can be subtle but not secretive about the theme. Since all writing intends to communicate, readers should be able to find all sorts of clues — often explicit — as to what the author meant to convey. In the same way gravity holds the earth together in an ecosystem, the theme of a story binds all the author's clues, and the other details of the story, together in an interpretation.

To put it another way, the theme is comparable to "the point" of a joke. Both the theme and the point of a joke can usually be stated in a sentence, but such a simple statement is a convenience to help readers hold a lot of things together in interrelated fashion. The search for themes, useful as they are, must not be substituted for the complexity represented by the entire story or joke.

The grand overarching theme of *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* is an examination of the workings of time. This theme is perhaps inevitable, given the transporting of a character from one historical period to another, but Marzollo imbues it with a freshness and a sense of inevitability.

The most obvious development of this theme is a comparison and contrast of everything about living in the two different centuries. This comparison is made explicit by Marzollo's having taken a modern character into the past and showing her reacting as a typical teenager of the 1980s might. This could lead to a fascinating assignment for students, who could make a chart listing likenesses and differences as an activity preliminary to writing about the comparison. Students might well examine their own lives as they look at Kate's comparing of cold cooked cabbage to the Kentucky Fried Chicken of her own time; of real enemies, shots, and barns burning to the basketball rivalry of her school; of the Yankees who burned down the Irish church to the Ku Klux Klan; of the same Yankees who burned down the Irish church to the Irish who burned down one of the Yankee's barns (students should notice the shifts possible in the kinds of comparisons explicit in the book). Some comparisons are total contrasts (nothing in Kate's experience prepared her to cut a large splinter out of Patrick's leg — p. 54). It would be easy for students to make long lists of such likenesses and differences, and doing so would direct their attention to details which they would otherwise tend to overlook, details which they must notice if they are to become mature readers of fiction. Furthermore, without a sense of the details, readers cannot formulate the large ideas and test them against the specifics.

The details also can lead to a class discussion about the relationship of *the unique, the concrete particulars,* to *the universal.* In this sense, the specifics of Kate's situation have two functions: they contribute to vividness and at the same time provide points of contact between her life and the lives of her readers. We like for a story both to transport us into another world and to remind us of our own. The chart of comparisons could provide a focus for such discussion.

Despite all the contrasts between her two worlds, Kate became aware "in a terrifying way that her body didn't seem to care what year it was" (p. 43). It continued to function the same as always. This recognition was enlarged by her learning that thoughts and emotions in the nineteenth century likewise coincided with her experience of living more than a hundred lears later. "Times" might change, but human nature remains constant. To be born means to have had a mother. The loss of first her home and then her second mother showed Kate — and will show the mature reader — that time carries people onward and changes their relationships. (Marzollo, by the way, dedicated her novel to her own mother.) It is also significant that Kate's 1981 emotions interacted easily with Patrick's of 1850.

Time changes not only relationships but also the people themselves. One of the assignments of greatest potential value for students would be to chart the adjustment of Kate to her new circumstances. In this sense, *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* fits the classic pattern of the novel of initiation. By tracing Kate's growth, students can participate in it vicariously. She adjusted her sense of squeamishness, her attitude toward work, her notion of the value of money, the meaning of religion, her respect for varied ways of living (including the Indians' — p. 146), her orientation toward herself as adult rather than child, her ability to empathize with other people (especially her second family, but others as well, such as Jed Barlow, the hateful Yankee), her responsibility to society (organizing unions) and her readiness to marry.

The ***structure*** of a piece of fiction is another of the literary elements that need to be taught, and in this novel the structure is a natural flow of linked experiences that lead to Kate's growth from child to adult.

Students must be shown that a plot summary like the one at the beginning of this article omits the links of *causality* which are necessary to structural development. Something happens, and as a result, a character does something. Then other characters respond. As a consequence, conflict eases in one relationship and intensifies in another. From all this movement, one or more characters is likely to grow — and so is a serious reader. Plot, then, involves much more than merely what happened.

This plot structure of cause-effect develops all the other aspects of the novel, fitting together so naturally that unsophisticated readers do not notice the artistry involved in making so many choices at once that support rather than conflict with one another. Obvious as it sounds when articulated, time does bring about the

passage from childhood to adulthood. That is, the structure develops the theme. What is much less obvious to adolescents is that time can bring years without adding maturity, wisdom. Chronological age, in other words, is a gift; depth and insight, on the other hand, must be earned by living thoughtfully and sometimes painfully. For all of us, in whichever century we live, the gift of biological life eventually ceases; but the lessons of life can be passed on, sometimes from person to person, as in families, and sometimes by means of intermediates, such as books — including this novel.

In the passage of time, many things are explained, and Kate learned a great deal. She acquired "a strange sort of newfound wisdom" (p. 119) all along the way. But it is true that time opens up new mysteries. Toward the end of the book, Kate came upon her idea to form unions and then saw herself as "part of the plan. Whose plan? Who was she striking a bargain with? Maybe it was her heart. Maybe it was God" (pp. 169-170). Neither Kate nor Marzollo ever answers these questions. The closest they come is a statement from Mother O'Hara: "For sure, it's a queer world, Kate" (p. 105).

For a book written for people not yet adults, *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* becomes surprisingly metaphysical at times; but it does so in terms that might occur to a perspicacious high school student — or be comprehensible to one reading this book. In thinking about a return to 1981, Kate expected to enjoy English class better than history: "God knows, she'd had enough history to last her a lifetime" (p. 101). History, that is, is more than a school subject; it is a mark made by people and events on time, concrete and palpable for a moment, and then only a memory or concept. (In "About the Author," Marzollo said that "history, after all, is the best story we have.") A mature reader might think of many things about our current world that would displease or strain a visitor from 131 years into the future. Students could list such ways and then work in small groups to plan a future utopia or anti-utopia. The chart of comparisons mentioned earlier could now be extended to include the future.

Readers who think how a visitor from the future might react to the present would understand more clearly what Patrick meant when he heard Kate talk about astronauts who "left their rubbish" on the moon (p. 140) and about the assassination of a President. "Kate, you may know *what* happens in the future, but you don't seem to understand why. You can't tell me that in America an Irish Catholic gets elected President and then both he and his

brother get shot and killed for another reason. Why else would they get shot?" (p. 139). That is, it is not enough to know what happens in time; one must also try to grasp its significance.

Another of Kate's struggles with the concept of time concerned her own amazing passage through it. At first she speculated that "lucky things keep happening . . . because I'm from the future. If something bad were to happen to me, I couldn't ever live in the future" (p. 77). Later, in the burning church with guns ready to be used against her, she reconsidered: "She could be killed now, go to Heaven, and be born again at a later time" (p. 109). She was grappling with the concepts of life and afterlife, of death and reincarnation, problems that have occupied the greatest theologians and philosophers of the ages. Patrick helped her think about these matters when the two of them were discussing their future in the West. "Mother and Father could look down at us from Heaven . . . hm-m-m. I wonder if Ma will tell Da about us and if he'll understand. He never met you, y' know. . . . But maybe they can see my sister Kate too. Maybe from up in Heaven they can see all of us" (p. 147).

Kate found that it is important to be cosmopolitan rather than xenophobic and chauvinistic about differences. There could be time bigots as well as racial or nationalistic bigots. At first she was eager to tell Patrick all about her times, convinced that they were superior to his. She could hardly wait to teach him to read, to warn him about such immediately future events as the Civil War, and to revel in accounts of the technical marvels of the 1980's. When Patrick responded with information of his own, she understood for the first time that "maybe he wanted to tell her about his world as much as she wanted to tell him about hers" (p. 135). As wonderful as he found Kate, Patrick was less favorably impressed with her world than she expected him to be: "Sure, Kate, I think it's lucky you're here where you can help us build the stone church [to replace the one burned down]. This world you come from sounds very queer" (p. 140). Patrick enjoyed Kate's American accent and slang (the gym teacher was "a real nerd"), but he held his linguistic own by speaking to her in Gaelic (*"Mavourneen dheelish,"* meaning "my sweet darling" — p. 137).

It is difficult to exhaust our examination of the theme of time in *Halfway Down Paddy Lane,* because it is not pasted on for artificial effect. On the contrary, it informs virtually every page, though with narrative force rather than philosophical musings. Instead of trying to make every possible statement about the theme, we will conclude by mentioning that Kate discovered the

elasticity of time: the speed with which it passes depends on the effect it has on the perceiver, not on seconds ticked off on the clock. When Kate and Mother O'Hara brought their lace to put on the altar, Kate "suddenly realized" that "she had arrived a week ago. . . . The Mass at Uncle Mick's house was only last Sunday. It felt much longer" (p. 107). Later she considered even more specifically the subjective response one makes to time.

> She thought of the first time she had gone down those narrow stairs. Patrick had just finished putting on her shoes. How long ago was that? Only two weeks? Impossible. She felt as if she had known Patrick for years — a hundred and thirty-one years, to be exact. Perhaps it was the attraction they felt for each other that had pulled her out of time and space toward him. Two weeks, a hundred and thirty-one years, fifteen years [Kate's age], eighteen years old [Patrick's age]. The numbers, under the circumstances, were meaningless (p. 150).

We will finish our analysis of *Halfway Down Paddy Lane* by suggesting a number of the kind of questions that teachers might use to stimulate a young reader to pass from a pure plot reader to an evaluator of the aesthetics and thought of a novel. The students will recognize, of course, that most of the questions have answers that are not either right or wrong but appropriate or inappropriate, depending on whether they harmonize with the other elements of fiction, with the author's *unified imagination*.

1. Why might Marzollo have picked fifteen and eighteen for the ages of Kate and Patrick, since after all they are considering marriage?
2. Why might Kate's father Calambra and the older Kate's father O'Hara be mentioned briefly but not be present in the novel?
3. Why would Marzollo give only vague and tentative explanations about the mechanism by which Kate traveled through time? [See one of them quoted above from p. 150.]
4. In which month did Kate's adventures begin? [July — p. 43] Why is it important for Marzollo to specify the month?
5. The limited omniscient point of view does not allow readers to get inside the thoughts of any character except Kate. Why might Marzollo have elected to deny herself access to Patrick's thoughts?
6. Why might Kate Calambra's mother not have gotten more suspicious when her daughter was replaced by Kate O'Hara?
7. At the end of the book, why did Kate not want to talk over her experiences with her real mother?

8. Marzollo's plot builds and builds, continually rising toward a moment of highest emotional and thematic significance. Are the emotional and the thematic climaxes the same?
9. Dramatic irony is the double view of a situation in which the audience knows something significant that a character does not. Dramatic irony is thus like a private joke between the writer and the audience. How is the last page an example of dramatic irony? What is its effect?
10. Imagery has the power to convey concisely, indirectly, and cogently a lot of thought, emotion, and imagination. Comment on both the literary and the emotional impact of each of the following images.
    a. Mother O'Hara refers to Nora as "madder than a tricked leprechaun" (p. 95).
    b. After the church was destroyed, Kate and Patrick "hugged so tight, it was as if the fire they felt in their burned skins welded them together" (p. 119).
    c. In the mill "Kate moved like a machine" (p. 78).
    d. Fleeing Patrick and Nora on her way to Lowell, Kate felt her "heart pressed into a small cold metal box" (p. 159).

The sample questions demonstrate that no one discussion can cover completely a subject like teaching the elements of fiction. There is always more that could have been said, more analysis that could have been done, at least on a work of fiction that deserves the attention. But we need not — and should not try to — deliver the final word on a writer's rich literary accomplishment. The goal is to lead students to start thinking for themselves, not to usurp their responsibility and steal their satisfaction. An enjoyable way for teachers to lead their student readers toward maturity is to have them actually use the tools of analysis, not merely memorize terms, important as they are. When students apply these tools to a novel written for their own age and reading level, they have the advantage of struggling with only one thing at a time. Later, as experienced analyzers, they can use the same tools to understand and enjoy more challenging selections.

Read Saul Bellow and Discover Your Environment

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In his article, "A Writer Looks at Chicago Culture" (*The Chicago Daily News*, November 11, 1972) Saul Bellow renders a pointillistic account of his impressions of Chicago as a nine-year-old. His youthful observations, gleaned from readings in the library and the coordinating of those readings with wanderings throughout the city, provided him with a rich storehouse of local color, characters, and situations that he used to produce an award-winning corpus of prose. The secondary students of Chicago's public schools, with insightful guidance by teachers with a similar love of the city, have a wealth of material with which to improve their reading about their environment. Reading Saul Bellow would provide a concomitant inspiration. Saul Bellow writes a candid prose that conveys the impact of his wild-eyed encounter with a Chicago library as a nine-year-old:

> The children in hard yellow chairs at the Humboldt Park branch, immersed in Mark Twain or Dickens, were getting ready for their encounter with the spirit of the place.... The books were bound in brown buckram. The pages were stained by soup and cocoa or by tears or by nosebleeds, and they were also fiercely annotated by borrowers. Readers denounced writers or praised them, argued with other readers around the margins — self-made prophets, experts, poets in their own right, patriots, subversives, philosophers, neighborhood historians arguing the Civil War and the Russian Revolution. One could learn a lot about the mental life of a democracy from these annotations....

Afterwards, as he reports in the article, Saul Bellow would augment his reading by taking excursions into the streets, taking his observations on a field trip as it were:

> I spent my summers in the alleys or walking downtown along Milwaukee Av. I invested my feelings in what there was, and now I can't withdraw them.... I know the feelings that Chicago can generate.

The entire article radiates with sociological, psychological, and mnemonic insight that covers the entire spectrum of Chicago's environment and the way its people live and think and work.

The Adventures of Augie March (The Macmillan Co., N.Y., 1953) is an excellent point of departure, and the student reader might well be advised to start there in his reading of Saul Bellow. The working out of scene, incident, and character in the novel gives more emphasis than the article. Here Saul Bellow takes a microcosmic look at situations and characters he merely glosses over in the article. "I am an American, Chicago born — Chicago, that somber city — and go at things as I have taught myself, free-style, and will make the record in my own way . . . ." Those opening lines in *The Adventures of Augie March* might have been spoken by any number of trucelent teenagers who live in Chicago and have the kind of "free-style" Saul Bellow uses in constructing the novel. Almost any scene in the book offers astute insight into environment and character, and the fact that the story is told from the subjective viewpoint increases its usefulness for the young reader. The immediacy of subjective reading (and writing) has been stressed many times, and *The Adventures of Augie March* is an excellent example. Its flippant tone and voice will delight the secondary student.

The impressionistic treatment of the Chicago environment is elucidated further in *Humboldt's Gift* (The Viking Press, N.Y. 1975). One can almost envision Saul Bellow on a walking tour of the kind he writes about in "A Writer Looks at Chicago Culture." His observations are given sharp focus, the kind of abject attention that can be nurtured by secondary students from reading *Humboldt's Gift,* and the kind of up-close attention to detail that is so much a part of reading:

> The huge pale lake washed forward. To the east was a white Siberian sky and McCormick Place, like an aircraft carrier, moored at the shore. Life had withdrawn from the grass. It had its wintry buff color . . . . Large parts of Chicago decay and fall down. Some are rebuilt, others just lie there. It's like a film montage of rise and fall and rise. Division Street where the old Bath stands used to be Polish and now is almost entirely Puerto Rican. In the Polish days, the small brick bungalows were painted fresh red, maroon and candy green. The grass plots were fenced with iron pipe . . . .

In addition to being rich in detail and imagery, the foregoing could be used by a teacher in instructing students how to write with fluency and polish just by observing the environment around them. *Humboldt's Gift* is full of such creative gems, and the parts of the book about Chicago represent a great vivisection of the city.

The Dean's December (Harper and Row, N.Y., 1982), Saul Bellow's most recent novel, is equally useful for teaching the

secondary student how a writer observes his environment and creates polished prose. In addition, *The Dean's December* is an excellent book to use in teaching students how omniscient writing is different from subjective, in being more psychological in its penetration of character. However, the rich detail found in Saul Bellow's other novels is here also, as in this typical example:

> You could see the soot mingling with the drizzle. Corde hadn't come to this neighborhood in thirty years. It was then already decaying, now it was fully rotted. Only a few old brick bungalows remained, and a factory here and there. The expressway had cut across the east-west streets. The one remaining landmark was the abandoned Englewood station — huge blocks of sandstone set deep, deep in the street, a kind of mortuary isolation, no travelers now, no trains . . .

Saul Bellow is only one of several writers whose treatment of a specific region can be useful for secondary readers. Also set in Chicago is the working class Irish story done so well by James T. Farrell. Harry Mark Petrakis is another writer with laurels gleaned from his Greek experience in Chicago. J. D. Salinger has written about the New York prep school milieu with unique elan. His novels are saturated with the singular and sometimes painful gropings of secondary students "getting ready for their encounters with the spirit of" New York City.

There are, of course, endless possibilities, and there are countless regional writers who would, with the aid of a committed teacher, be invaluable in "hooking" secondary students and increasing their commitment to reading because of an interest in their local environment. Moreover, interest in reading such works can encourage students and help them realize that their own environment has rich and graphic imagery for personal expression.

The Gift of Loneliness: Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

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Alice Walker's stunning 1982 novel *The Color Purple* won a Pulitzer Prize in 1983 making the Georgia-born author and poet the first black woman ever to receive the award for fiction. The book

is beautifully written, rich in humanity and humor, sorrow and irony, and laced with brilliantly conceived characters. Walker explores themes, many of which germinate in her earlier short stories and poetry, that illuminate the human condition: loss of innocence, search for faith, the nature of human suffering, and the triumph of the human spirit. Additionally, she examines some taboos in the relationships between men and women as well as between parents and children. The book treats the reader to a journey where the characters discover beauty, truth, love, and the answer to the meaning of life.

To focus on the themes of incest and lesbianism would be a misreading of this deceptively simple symbolic novel which has both subplots and tales within tales. The story is set in rural Georgia, beginning two generations ago and covering thirty years in the lives of the characters. It is told from the viewpoint of poor, ragged, semi-literate Celie, who speaks in black folk dialect. Unfolding from an epistolary style which has Celie, out of loneliness and despair, write letters first to God, then to her sister Nettie in Africa, the plot advances on the briefest lines of dialogue. From the first line of the book:

> You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your Mammy.

the reader instantly identifies with fourteen-year-old Celie, who is caught in the horror of incest and abuse. Shortly after giving birth the second time, Celie finds that her older child has turned up missing. When her mother asks where it is, Celie replies:

> I say God took it.
> He took it while I was sleeping.
> Kilt it out there in the woods. Kill this one too, if he can (12).

Not until much later in the book does Celie find out that the children's father is really her stepfather and that her own father had been lynched — information that has been cruelly withheld from her.

Alice Walker attacks head-on the taboos that most black writers shy away from, with the notable exceptions of James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison and Toni Morrison. Like the author Nora Neale Hurston, whom she admires, Walker is not embarrassed by anything black people do.

Celie's younger sister Nettie seeks asylum from the advances of their stepfather by going to Africa with Sam and Corrine, a young missionary couple who have adopted Celie's two children. Celie is then married off to Albert, a widower, who fancies Nettie rather than Celie but needs a servant to care for two of his children

(their mother has been shot by her lover). Beaten and abused, Celie is miserable until the day when Albert brings home a former common-law wife named "Shug" (short for "sugar") Avery, with whom Albert had borne three children before his previous marriage. Shug has been living an independent life as a blues singer, leaving their illegitimate children to be raised by her parents. But now Shug is ill, and when Albert asks Celie to nurse her to health, there results a menage à trois with a twist: Celie falls for Shug, forming a lesbian relationship, while both are living with Albert. Walker's treatment of this taboo is characterized by tenderness and humor. While bathing Shug, Celie says:

> First time I got the full sight of Shug Avery long black body with it black plum nipples, look like her mouth, I thought I had turned into a man (53).

Walker's female characters come brilliantly alive under the skillful hand of their creator. Shug Avery symbolizes the beautiful black singers of the 30s and 40s: the Bessie Smiths, Clara Wards, Sarah Vaughns, and Aretha Franklins. Celie's loving descriptions of Shug give the reader a close perspective. When Shug first arrives, Celie says:

> And she dress to kill. She got on a red wool dress and a chestful of black beads. A shiny black hat with what look like chickinhawk feathers curve down side one cheek, and she carrying a snakeskin bag, match her shoes (50).

Shug's eyes fascinate Celie probably because they betray a suffering Celie can relate to: "I look into her eyes. Her eyes say Yeah it *bees* that way sometimes" (18). Towards the end of the book Celie describes an aged Shug:

> When you look into Shug's eyes, you know she been where she been and seen what she see; did what she did, and now she know . . .
>
> And if you don't git out the way, she'll tell you about it (236).

Walker is preoccupied in her writing with the suffering of black women throughout history. In her words recorded on a cassette by John O'Brien ("If God Ever Listen," in *Interviews with Black Writers*. New York: Liveright, 1973). Walker says, "I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties and the triumphs of black women." In Walker's novel, Nettie's letters to Celie are rich in stories of the things she has learned living with the Olinka tribe in Africa. This epistolary method provides Walker with a means of revealing the past in order to provide an understanding of the source of the oppression of the black woman. Nettie writes how the pampered Olinka men sat around

while the tribeswomen did all the work. Young girls had to have their faces scarred and their genitalia mutilated in bloody initiation rites. Olinka men didn't listen to their women or even look at them while they were speaking. For a woman to look at a man's face was considered brazen. Olinka men literally had the power of life or death over the women, Nettie relates.

After Nettie and Samuel, whom she has married after his wife's death, become disillusioned with their work, they discover that oppression is not reserved for black women alone. In a final irony, the Olinkas are eventually run off their tribe's land by English landowners and the Dutch government who intend to build a rubber plantation in anticipation of World War II.

The relationships between males and females is important in *The Color Purple* as well as in Alice Walker's other works: *In Love and In Trouble* (1967), *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (1971), and *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (1983) — all from Harcourt, San Diego. Conflicts occur over the traditional male qualities of power, dominance, and control and the female traits of submission, obedience, and servitude. Albert teaches his son Harpo to beat his wife Sophia to make her mind. "Wives is like children," he says, "You have to let 'em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a sound beating" (42). Being a strong-willed woman, Sophia fights back, telling Celie, "I'm getting tired of Harpo. All he think about since us married is how to make me mind. He don't want a wife, he want a dog" (67).

Young Celie knows only beatings and sexual coldness before Shug arrives to teach her how to love. Relations with Albert are only empty machinations. She tells Shug:

> Most times I pretend I ain't there. He never know the difference. Never ast me how I feel nothing. Just do his business, get off, go to sleep.
>
> Shug say, why Miss Celie, you make it sound like he is going to the toilet on you.
>
> That what I feel like I say (79).

In one of her essays, Walker discusses how Jean Toomer described the slave women as enduring so much abuse that their minds were forced to desert their bodies. Celie describes this same feeling:

> It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie you a tree. That's howcome I know that trees fear man (30).

Celie's relations with Shug are the opposite. Tenderly, Shug teaches Celie about her own body, using a mirror. "It a lot prettier than you thought aint it," Shug says:

> It mine, I say. Where the button?
> Right near the top, she say. The part that stick out a little.
> I look at her and touch it with my finger. A little shiver go through me. Nothing much. But just enough to tell me that this the right button to mash. Maybe (80).

Samuel and Nettie seem to represent the ideal male-female relationship in the book. They become lovers and partners only after first becoming trusted friends and companions, working for common goals in the spirit of equality.

Concerned that women have been frustrated in their attempts at becoming creative artists through the ages, Alice Walker uses the craft of quiltmaking to symbolize this struggle. Her own mother was a quiltmaker, and Walker was deeply affected by a quilt that she saw in the Smithsonian depicting the crucifixion. It had been created by an anonymous black woman more than a hundred years before.

Ironically, in the novel, Nettie writes that the Olinka tribesmen made quilts which were full of animals, birds and people. Celie and Sophia decide to sew a quilt using a pattern called "Sister's Choice." To make stars for the quilt, Celie uses scraps from Shug's cast-off yellow satin dress. Learning from Shug how to make pants, Celie eventually turns the skill into a small business in Memphis and becomes financially independent.

Walker believes strongly in the ability of people to change and grow, attributing this belief to her work in registering black voters in Mississippi during the Civil Rights Movement, when she saw a great deal of change. Most of the characters in *The Color Purple* change, even the minor ones. After Sophia leaves Harpo, he changes, learning to cook, clean house, and care for his children. Sophia finds him one morning cradling his father tenderly in his arms. With Celie gone to Memphis with Shug, even Albert learns to clean house, do the dishes, and work in the field — chores which he never did before when women were around. Celie changes from a ragged child into a sophisticated lady. Describing herself when she returns from Memphis, she says:

> Look different. Got on some dark blue pants, and a white silk shirt that look righteous. Little red flat-heeled slippers, and a flower in my hair (195).

Towards the end of the book, Albert asks Celie to remarry him in body as well as spirit because he had been too big a fool to let

himself care for her while they were married. Although as Celie grows older, her dialect undergoes some change, it doesn't lose its essential soul. She tells Albert:

> Here us is, I thought, two old fools left over from love, keeping each other company under the stars (238).

Like her literary predecessors Richard Wright and James Baldwin, Alice Walker explores the concept of God in *The Color Purple* and has her characters come to reject the traditional notion of a white God in favor of an inner spirit which resides in all of us and ultimately in everything. This spirit can be traced, according to Walker, to an African belief called *animism* that makes it possible to view all creation as living, as being inhabited by spirit. In existential terms, this is similar to *essence*. The major conflict becomes the struggle between *Everythingness*, an optimistic belief that the human spirit will not only endure but prevail, and *Nothingness*, a resignation to chaos and despair.

In a compelling part of the novel, Shug and Celie have a discussion about God. Young Celie describes the traditional God she has been praying to:

> He big and old and tall and graybearded and white.
> He wear white robes and go barefooted.
> Blue eyes? She ast.
> Sort of Bluish-gray. Cool, Big though.
> White lashes I say.
> She laugh (177).

But Shug has a different God to teach Celie:

> God is inside you and inside everything else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it (177).

As the story progresses, Celie adopts this position. She shocks Sophia when she links God and reefer:

> I smoke when I want to talk to God. I smoke when I want to make love. Lately I feel like me and God make love just fine anyhow, whether I smoke reefer or not.
> God know what I mean (197).

Nettie relates in the book a long tale about how the Olinka tribe came to worship the roofleaf as their God. She then explains how her faith has changed:

> God is different to us now more in spirit than ever before, and more internal. Most people think he has to look like someone — a roofleaf or Christ — but he don't. And not being tied to what God looks like, frees us (227).

Tree symbolism in the book seems to be tied to the belief in *animism*. When Shug first arrives, Celie says, "She look so stylish it look like the trees all around stand up for a better look" (50).

When Celie stands up to Albert for the first time she says, "I give it straight to him just like it come to me. And it seem to come to me from the trees" (187). Shug says:

> My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being a part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed (178).

Flower symbolism in Walker's work stems from her childhood memories of her mother's talent for raising flowers, for creating beauty out of poverty. When Celie returns to her stepfather with Shug towards the end of the story, it is spring and she has been spiritually reborn among the flowering trees, jonquils, roses and lilies. In fact, Shug's real name is Lillie although mention of her is frequently juxtaposed with roses:

> Shug a beautiful something, let me tell you. She frown a little, look out across the yard, lean back in her chair, look like a big rose (178).

Celie ponders thoughtfully on the idea that suggested the novel's title:

> I been so busy thinking about him I never truly notice nothing God make. Not a blade of corn (how it do that?) not the color purple (where it come from?) Not the little wildflowers. Nothing (179).

Shug says, "I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it" (178).

Walker admired the work of Flannery O'Connor, who lived a few miles from her childhood home, for its economy of style, but more importantly for O'Connor's understanding that the question of race is really just the first question on a long list. In *The Color Purple,* Celie says, "I couldn't understand why us have life at all if all it can do is make you feel bad" (246). And like O'Connor, Walker has the truth spoken by the most unlikely characters. Albert says at the end of the book:

> You ast yourself one question. It leads to fifteen. I start to wonder why us need love. Why us suffer. Why us black. Why us men and women. Where do children really come from. And if you ast yourself why you black or a man or woman or a bush it don't mean nothing if you don't ast why you here period (247).

Then to Celie, he poignantly answers his own questions:

> I think us here to wonder, myself.... The more I wonder, he say, the more I love.
>
> And people start to love you back I bet, I say.
>
> They do, he say, surprise (247).

I recommend that everyone read this book and that it be studied by mature students in high school and college classes, despite my misgivings that it may have to be defended to a censorship committee in order to claim its right to be a part of the English curriculum. Some misguided censors will probably charge that the book is anti-white, anti-male, anti-God, anti-parent, and anti-nuclear family. It will be difficult to convince them that the book is about beauty, truth, love and the triumph of the human spirit.

In speaking of her creative talent, Alice Walker spoke of how it often served as an antidote to depression and even suicidal urges. In fact, she dedicates the book thus:

> To the Spirit:
> Without whose assistance
> neither this book
> nor I
> would have been
> written

At the end of the novel she adds a page:

> I thank everybody in this book for coming.
> A. W., author and medium

Alice Walker once expressed the hope that someday a generation of men and women would read her work because, as she says: "it is a true account of my feelings, my perceptions and my imagination, and because it will reveal something to them of their own selves." (O'Brien Cassette) And she concludes: "The gift of loneliness is sometimes a radical vision of society or one's people that has not been previously taken into account."

I believe the gift of loneliness that produced this remarkable book is a precious gift to the world and ultimately will be a gift to immortality.

A Sampling of Stories from *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*

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Perhaps one of the easiest ways to both refresh and update our store of literature is with new short stories. Ursula Le Guin's *The*

Wind's Twelve Quarters is a collection of seventeen, ranging from fantasy with elements of myth, to science fiction of the psychological variety, to a hybrid kind of surrealistic tale that she calls *psychomyth*. Of these stories, I will acquaint you with a sampling of four which I think particularly lend themselves to being taught in middle or secondary school.

The first story in the book is a fantasy piece called "Semley's Necklace." It is steeped in Norse images and, indeed, Le Guin borrows intentionally from Nordic mythology. Her heroine Semley is modeled on the goddess Freia and the quest narrative is based on the story of Freia's necklace.

We learn that the protagonist Semley is a child of the Angyar — a proud, noble race, but a race unseated, by the arrival of the powerful Starlords, from a position of superiority. The Starlords have disrupted the social order by befriending the lowly Clayfolk and demanding tribute from the Angyar. It is in this climate of both pride and shame, of splendor and poverty that Semley grows up. She becomes the bride of Durhal, also a high-ranking Angyar, but despite her love for him, she feels a growing discontent. She yearns for her lost family jewel — a large blue sapphire set on a finely wrought gold chain — which would serve as a mark of her high seat and pure Angyar blood, and would be a fitting dowry to give to Durhal.

Though warned not to seek the gem amongst the Clayfolk, Semley is determined to do so, especially since it was they who had originally crafted the treasure and who, she suspects, stole it away again. The Clayfolk, sullen and suspicious but in awe of her perfection and nobility, take Semley into their low, grey caves where she is presented to their Clayfolk Lords, who are pompous and arrogant (laughably so, to Semley). Dressed like Starlords, they demand to know why they, though formerly inferiors but now superiors, should help Semley find the treasure. Regal and unmoved, she answers that she, an Angyar, will give them her thanks, and that should be enough. The dwarves confer and agree to take her in "one long night" to where the necklace now rests. The Clayfolk put the beautiful Semley in a spacecraft with four of their dwarves as her guides. In this tiny craft, the four ugly Clayfolk, wondrous of Semley's beauty, begin to touch her hair, her bronze limbs, and even her neck, until she finally resists them with a hard stare. At last, they come to a land of lightspeed technology, a dominant world, where Rocannon resides. At the museum where Semley goes to claim her necklace, Rocannon and the museum curator are stunned by the striking appearance of the seeming-

goddess. They place the jewel around her neck, with Rocannon wondering whether the beautiful alien is the queen of the dwarves or their captive.

After the return voyage, Semley arrives home, feeling an invigorating freedom, so unlike her state during the claustrophobic trip with the Clayfolk, an ordeal which served indeed as payment for the necklace. At home she learns that during her quest sixteen years have elapsed. Durhal is dead, killed in a battle during the ninth year of her conjectured captivity by the Clayfolk. Hadre, her baby daughter, is now a beautiful golden-haired maiden, nearly the mirror image of Semley, for whom time has stood still, during the lightspeed voyage. Placing her treasure around her daughter's neck, Semley runs away into the forest, never to be seen again.

Like all myths, this one is haunting, rich and complex. The theme of pride, the question of social order and disruption, the mixed nature of the necklace (is it a treasure or a curse?) — all these make this short story a valuable reading experience. Students may also want to read the Norse myth itself and speculate as to why we continue to enjoy and re-work myths.

"Nine Lives" is much longer than "Semley's Necklace" and it is *bona fide* science fiction. In it, Le Guin uses the idea of the clone as a point of departure for exploring the idea of "the stranger."

The story can be summed up as follows. Owen Pugh and Alvaro Martin, two geologists and friends, are on an ugly, hostile, uninhabited planet which is extremely prone to quakes. The two men have been on a mission exploring for valuable minerals for the last two years. Having found uranium, they await the arrival of a team to mine the ore. The team turns out to be a "ten-clone" of a now-deceased genius scientist. The ten-clone, self-sufficient in every way, sets up and operates the mine. One day a severe quake destroys the mine and kills all but one of the clones, Kaph, who lives, reluctantly, and slowly learns to take steps toward friendship with Pugh and Martin — indeed the first real strangers he has had to meet "uninsulated" from his other nine selves.

What is interesting in this story is the exploration of the psychology that develops between the (pre-accident) ten-clone and the two geologists. This clone, which Pugh calls "oneself ten times over," is thoroughly selfish in that it is completely self-supporting and self-satisfying. It cannot be penetrated socially or psychologically. The members of the clone think, feel, and look almost exactly alike, although through chromosome manipulation, five are male and five are female. They are all geniuses and have all the beauty and sexuality ("self"-satisfied) of youth.

Inevitably, Martin and Pugh cannot help feeling excluded from this phenomenal "team." The geologists begin to speak to each other in a language that the clone does not understand and to begin to use epithets such as "the golden horde" and "the wave of the future" to describe the ten-clone. Pugh gives up trying to use the clones' individual names and eventually responds with conflicting ambivalence, feeling both fascination and fear of their power. Soon the friendship between Martin and Pugh rocks under the strange emotional pressure that proximity to the ten-clone brings with it; the two find it harder and harder to get along. The ten-clone, at work, proves to be thoroughly efficient as a team — unlike Martin and Pugh, who admittedly spend seven hours out of every ten misunderstanding each other.

After the mine accident that proved fatal to all the clones but Kaph, Pugh and Martin watch over the survivor very closely, puzzling about the quake that had caused the disaster. It seemed that all the clones had had the same idea, to run back into the mine to save the one farthest in. One would have thought that out of a team of "ten ordinary, confused guys," more would have gotten out. Martin muses that maybe a multiple clone does *not* make a perfect team.

Kaph finally recovers his physical strength but seems to be quite withdrawn socially. Pugh understands that Kaph has to be newly socialized as a singleton for, as one out of ten, he has had no real sense of "the other."

One day, Martin goes out to do some work and encounters trouble during a quake but isn't able to communicate back for help. Pugh, having felt the tremors and realizing that his friend might be in danger, defies danger to help his friend. The two come back — unharmed, but shaken.

Kaph, intent, is curious about Pugh's motives for risking his life for Martin and asks Pugh if he loves his friend. Pugh replies that yes, he loves him; he is his friend. Kaph, uncertain, asks how he knows.

> ... But Pugh could not tell him. 'I don't know' he said, 'it's practice partly. I don't know. We're each of us alone, to be sure. What can you do but hold your hand out in the dark?'

The two finally fall asleep but not before Pugh mumbles a good-night and Kaph, after a time, responds.

As a reflection of Le Guin's probing mind, this story certainly speaks well for her. It is a rich mesh of ideas. It may be an excellent jumping-off point for many topics of discussion, including:

1. The fear of "the stranger" — Is this fear natural? or learned?
2. The value, joy and difficulty of communicating with others
3. Ingroup/outgroup dynamics — Do we base our behavior on that of others?
4. The team — What "clonish" characteristics does any good team have to have?
5. The slow process of making friends

"Things" is one of Le Guin's *psychomyths*. The story is given archetypal settings: an island, a village and a land beside the sea. The main character, Lif, is a brickmaker who takes pride in his work. Nearly all the inhabitants of this small island village believe "The End" is imminent. Most of them have cleared their belongings out of their homes and have burned them to "free themselves of things . . . from the weight that drags them down." They kill their animals, poison their own wells, and wreck their fields as preparation for impending disaster. They encourage Lif to do the same and come with them "above the ending world." The villagers, their wrecking done, spend their time at the "weeping" or with the "Ragers" at "Heights Hall."

But Lif cannot bring himself to destroy his carefully made bricks; he feels only time can do that. Furthermore, he has a vision that there are islands out farther than he can see and there are sailboats from those islands that bob almost unseen on the waves. When he is joined by a widow with her baby son, the only others to stay in the community, Lif finds a use for his bricks, his "things." He takes them to the seashore and builds the only thing he can — an undersea road that will go as far as his bricks will take him. He has to do this building in secret, though, for the "Ragers," watching him from the heights, would not permit such an "affirmation" as constructing a road would seem to be.

Time passes. Finally all the village is silent; all the people are gone. Lif and the widow run out of food and decide they must leave although the causeway is only 120 feet long. But, in spite of the ocean's buffeting and its icy coldness, the three go out as far as the road will take them. Suddenly, they hear "Wait" — from the dancing white light of a sail. Lif sees the sail leaning towards them and sees reaching arms:

> Come, Come on the ship, come with us to the Islands. Hold on, he said softly to the woman, and they took the last step.

This story of Lif is simply intriguing. Is "The End" *coming* or is it *brought?* Does Lif die? Or does he go on to a new life? Or both? The ambiguity is very well handled. There is sufficient evi-

dence, though, for students to conclude that Lif is above all taking responsibility for himself and is following a dream — in the face of a majority that are wrong-headed, unimaginative "followers." Students will want to discuss what the curious lack of all quotation marks means and what the archetypal elements suggest about Le Guin's artistic purpose. This is a theme story par excellence, with an encouraging message — that no matter what your place is in life, you can create your own destiny.

The last in my sampling of stories from *The Wind's Twelve Quarters* is "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," which won a Hugo Award for science fiction in 1974. It is based on the familiar idea of the scapegoat.

In the story, we find ourselves in Omelas, which seems to be a utopia: Omelas "bright towered by the sea" is a city whose people are "happy as children; mature, intelligent and passionate as adults." It is a city where a festival is always going on. Indeed, on the edge of the festival crowd is a young child who may play the thin magic of a flute, rapt, never ceasing, fully regarded and respected by the people who listen and smile. The narrator goes on to describe more of the beautiful existence of the people of Omelas, but then asks, "Do you believe? Do you accept the festival, the city, the joy? No? Then let me describe one more thing. . . ."

What is then described is a child locked away in a basement room, a filthy, disgusting spectacle. It cowers in a corner, whimpering. It is naked and thin, with a protruding belly. It is, by now, feebleminded through fear, malnutrition and neglect. It is, also, the "tiny" sacrifice the Omelans must make in return for their lovely lives. All Omelans know of the child's existence, for it is part of the terms of their happiness. All accept it, without guilt, as their responsibility. . . . That is, all but a few, who leave Omelas: they "walk ahead into the darkness and . . . do not come back."

This story embodies a powerful idea. It undoubtedly forces readers to examine moral values — their own and those of society. Certainly a discussion of this tale should provoke lively thinking and discussion.

Ursula Le Guin is a contemporary writer with real classroom possibilities, and her work is deserving of teachers' attention. She has won several literary awards, including the Gandalf Prize for science fiction. A romantic, she values love and adventure, and her writing shows this quite clearly. Her protagonists all tend to be dreamers of some kind, but they are dreamers who take responsibility for their lives. Furthermore, her visual style and her clean,

elegant prose make her fantasy world accessible to us as co-imaginers. When determining the basic needs of our students, let us not forget the importance of stimulating their imagination!

The Chronicles of Prydain An Inexhaustible Source for Literature Classes

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In myths and legends cauldrons have possessed a variety of powers. In Lloyd Alexander's novel *The Black Cauldron,* the magical vessel has the power to regenerate slain warriors who, transformed, have become mute and enslaved to an evil power. Intrigued by Alexander's imaginative use of legend mixed with such characters as an assistant pig keeper, I recommended the reading of this novel to some of my high school readers of fantasy. In a few weeks my recommendation came back to me in a student's enthusiastic comment about enjoying but also puzzling over a book with a comedy team of little old enchantresses and the description of a cauldron with chilling powers. The interest in *The Black Cauldron* caused me to rethink and investigate the use in my high school class of Lloyd Alexander's five-novel series, *The Prydain Chronicles* (N.Y.: Dell Paperbacks).

A speech by Alexander, "High Fantasy and Heroic Romance," in which he redescribes J. R. R. Tolkien's analysis of the cauldron story analogy helped me to rationalize further classroom use of *The Chronicles:*

> The pot holds a rich and fascinating kind of mythological minestrone. Almost everything has gone into it, and almost anything is likely to come out of it: morsels of real history spliced —with imaginary history, fact and fancy, daydreams and nightmares. It is inexhaustible as those legendary vessels that could never be emptied.
>
> Among the most nourishing bits and pieces we can scoop out of the pot are whole assortments of characters, events, and situations that occur again and again in one form or another

> throughout much of the world's mythology: heroes and villains, fairy godmothers and wicked stepmothers, princesses and pig keepers, prisoners and rescuers; ordeals and temptations, the quest for the magical object, the set of tasks to be accomplished. And a whole arsenal of cognominal words, enchanted weapons; a wardrobe of cloaks of invisibility, seven-league boots; a whole zoo of dragons, helpful animals, birds, and fish.[5]

I was convinced I should bring that cauldron into my classroom.

After reading the story of Taran's quest in the five books of *The Chronicles of Prydain*, based on the Welsh legend *Mabingoin*, I divided the class into five groups with each assigned one book for class reporting designed to encourage the listeners to read the book they had not been assigned. First, the report on *The Book of Three* in which young Taran's adventures begin with a chase after a run-away pig introduces the major characters of the series. There are Eilonwy, the high-spirited heroine; Gurgi, a lovable companion; Fflewdur, the cowardly knight; and the adults representing good (in Gwydion, an unassuming hero) and evil (in the wicked enchantress, Achren). The group reports continued with a retelling of Taran's headstrong chases in the first book for an oracular pig, to the second book's almost doomed search for an evil cauldron, with both books sharing Taran's search for the identity of his parents. Listening to the fourth and fifth group reports, we realized the quest of Taran changed from that of objects and people to the more abstract search for self identity. The group discussions and questions helped to retell the plot, and to describe character, setting, and theme, but, after the final group and individual written reports, I felt as if we had completed recitations and written reports that had been guided by the same questions. The fascination and variety that the books offered still seemed to be bubbling in the cauldron of the story.

In replanning the next year's group work for *The Prydain Chronicles* I remembered my student's reaction to the coldness of *The Black Cauldron* and the similar chilling effect certain scenes in the movie "Excalibur" had on me. I followed the plan of dividing my class into five groups, assigning one book per group, but my directions for reports were different this time. First I asked students to visualize and describe a scene from the novel that would encourage an audience to read the story (they were not to give away the entire plot). Secondly they were to decide on a list of words to describe the action, characters, and mood of the book. Also I broke the chronological retelling order deliberately by assigning

the first report to the second book *The Black Cauldron* in which the youthful dreams of Taran are challenged. The students decided that sadness and sorrow were the prominent emotions in a story where prideful Ellidry, a king's son, joins Taran and his friends, mocking each for what he sees as their weaknesses, calling Taran "a pig boy," Eilonwy, "a scullery maid," and Fflewdur, "a harp scraper." Scenes of the group's conflicts on the journey to the hostile kingdom, in addition to descriptions of the "Cauldron Born," evil Arawn's bloodless army of death reincarnate, were reported by the group.

Other starting points for reports could be the fourth book, *Taran the Wanderer*, or the fifth, *The High King*, both of which deal with Taran's search for self-identity. For *Taran the Wanderer* the group decided on the feelings of isolation Taran experienced when he made the choice of staying and working with the crippled herdsman Craddoc, who claimed to be his father. The description of Taran taking the risk of rescuing Craddoc from an icy cliff is the scene that was described. In *The High King* Taran and his companions cooperate to share responsibility and authority to defeat the tyranny of Arawn's evil. Brief sketches describing part of each character's struggle with this challenge were used by the group.

In contrast to the somber tone of the first three presentations are the love and laughter of the first of the series, *The Book of Three* and the third, *The Castle of Llyr*. In the first, Taran is the newly appointed assistant pig keeper and starts his journey in search of a lost pig, the humor of which is best pictured by the character, Gurgi. At first Taran is mildly annoyed at such an untidy, whining creature, who smells like a "wet wolfhound" and looks like "an owl's nest in need of house cleaning." In *The Castle of Llyr* the lighthearted hide-and-seek chases were visualized by the group, especially one where cowardly Fflewdur charms a giant cat, Llyan, with his music and in doing so takes on the responsibility of keeping her calm and purring so she will not attack Taran, Gurgi, and the others. All the books offer a variety of scenes and situations for descriptions, which began class conversations comparing and contrasting dreams and nightmares that represented the hopes and failures of the characters.

In evaluating the interests and responses of the class I noted that in the students' final written reports, they referred to books in the series not assigned to them. A few students commented on how the story of Taran might be retold in an order other than chronological. The resulting written reports offered the variety of ideas and ideals that the story cauldron promises.

Each time I have taught *The Prydain Chronicles* it has become a richer and more fascinating cauldron of ideas for me and my students. Some other approaches I am considering are to use the speeches of Lloyd Alexander which have been published in *The English Journal* and *The Horn Book*, asking students to read and talk about connections between Alexander's views as a writer and the books they have read. The motif of the seasons, which provides a framework for the chronological sequence for each of the books in the *Chronicle*, could be discussed and students assigned the research problem of finding examples from art, music, and literature that use a similar framework. For example, Peter Brueghel's 16th century paintings, "Haymaking," "Harvesters," "The Return of the Herd," and "Hunters in the Snow" could be compared with 17th century Jacob van Ruisdael's "Wheatfields." Music like Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons" could be contrasted to Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring," which shocked 19th century audiences. In an article, "Classic Hero in New Mythology" by Marion Carr, Jan de Vries' heroic motifs from *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend* are suggested for use in comparing heroines and heroes, old and new. Or another possibility is a literature unit posing the question, "What is classic?" in which students collect a variety of literature from *Alice in Wonderland* to *Beowulf* to evaluate the attributes of "classic."

Before I read *The Black Cauldron* myself and listened to the reactions of my students I had been influenced by the recommended ages of upper elementary and junior high in reviews and on book jackets for Alexander's books and was unwilling to try his writing in high school. In an interview with Justine Wintle, Alexander gives an answer to the who-I-write-for question:

> I never intended to write down to children. I would much rather speak to the growing adult in the child than speak to the child where he is at a given moment. I hope they sense that, because I believe growing up is what it is all about. The more I look back, not only on the books I have written for children but on those I've written for adults too, it seems to me that this is the deepest underlying theme. It's certainly one that has preoccupied me constantly. There are a great many writers for children, and splendid writers for children, who are perhaps more interested in recapturing their own childhood; whereas I am trying to come to terms with my adulthood. I have a funny kind of impression that the kids sense this too, that I speak to the child as a growing person.[3]

Now I bring a story cauldron to the classroom knowing that each time a student comes to dip into the stew of ideas and ideals each taste will be different, recreated from an earlier sample.

NOTES

[1] Lloyd Alexander, "High Fantasy and Heroic Romance," *Horn Book* 47 (Dec. 1971), p. 597.

[2] Lloyd Alexander, *The Pied Pipers*, eds. Justin Wintle and Emma Fisher (New York: Paddington Press, 1974), p. 213.

Breaking the Barriers: Theodore Sturgeon's *More Than Human*

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Since its publication in 1953, *More Than Human* has come to be regarded as a classic of science fiction. The reasons are many, including the novel's original treatment of parapsychology and human evolution, its emotional sensitivity, and its stylistic quality. Regarding its exploration of human feelings and the quality of its writing, R. Dale Mullen has said that Sturgeon deals with emotion "in far greater detail than most SF writers" and is "perhaps as skillful as any other SF writer (with the obvious exception of Le Guin)...."[1] Eric S. Rabkin in *The Fantastic in Literature* seconds these views, saying that the novel is a moving and "very well written work."[2] In *Science Fiction: History, Science, Vision*, Rabkin and his co-author Robert Scholes credit Sturgeon with making "language itself important," with making "style count."[3] It is not only, then, the novel's originality but also its skillful integration of feeling and language that make it an excellent work of fiction — well worth teaching to high school and university students.

As a story about people who progress from loneliness and alienation towards community, identity, and fulfillment, *More Than Human* employs appropriate "objective correlative" to convey its emotional vigor artistically. According to T. S. Eliot's famous dictum, the "only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula

of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts . . . are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."[4] In addition to the situations and actions of the characters in *More Than Human*, the "objects" or images that most clearly correspond to its emotional and psychological impact are those of barriers or obstacles to personal growth and interpersonal relationships. Quite literally, the novel is about overcoming barriers — physical and mental. Some of the physical barriers are forests, fences, walls, doors, buildings, and institutions. Some of the mental barriers are deficient intellectual capacity, the cumbersomeness of speech, puritanical sexual attitudes, parental authority, racial prejudice, and psychological blocks. These barriers, which are closely related, must be penetrated, overturned, or stripped away so that the main characters in the book can come together (or "blesh," as Sturgeon says) and form the next stage in human evolution — *homo gestalt*.

This new human entity consists of a symbiotic relationship among an idiot, three children, a baby, and two young men. Each member of the relationship has his or her own individuality and function, and working together they form a whole that is potentially much greater than the sum of its parts. As Gerry Thompson, one of the two young men, explains (after penetrating self-examination under the direction of a psychiatrist): "I'm the central ganglion of a complex organism which is composed of Baby, a computer; Bonnie and Beanie, teleports; Janie, telekineticist; and myself, telepath and central control. . . . Lone [the idiot] organized it [the gestalt, as its original head or central control]. . . . I replaced Lone, but I was too underdeveloped when he died."[5] As we shall see, Gerry is underdeveloped morally; but for the gestalt to reach its greatest potential it must have an ethical dimension — the role or function fostered by Hip Barrows. The growth of this marvelous new organism is long and arduous, consisting of many obstacles and pitfalls.

The first member of the gestalt we meet is the idiot, Lone. The main obstacles in his life are, of course, mental. For him "the little link between word and significance hung broken" (p. 1). Unable to understand the "murmurings" and messages conveyed to him "from hundreds . . . of voices," he finds "Nothing that related to him; nothing he could use" (p. 3). Considered a freak by other people, he lives mostly in the forest, "somewhere, apart" from society — neglected, isolated, alone" (p. 1). The only faculties he has that are capable of breaking through his isolation are his eyes and his "inner thing" (p. 2). "His eyes were excellent. . . ."

When "someone met his eyes there would be a coin in his hand, a piece of bread, a fruit" (p. 1). Four times the power of his eyes has enabled him to escape jail. Lone's "inner thing" is his ability to receive and record feelings, "Radiations of fear, tense fields of ... discontent," from others — in particular, children (p. 3). Unfortunately, he is "unaware of his inner ear." And thus he is "a poor example of man" (p. 3).

Receiving one day the silent radiations of an unhappy child unknown and distant to him, the idiot eventually responds by following those radiations to the home of Evelyn Kew. All her life she has been confined by psychological barriers that her father and older sister have imposed in an effort to protect her from sin (i.e., sexuality). Between her father and her sister, "a mighty structure of purity was created for Evelyn" (p. 4). As a result of her father's puritanical obsessions, this confining psychological structure has its physical counterparts in the estate where the Kews live: "a heavy house" with "no driveway, but a path which turned and turned again, so that from the windows no one could see where it went" (p. 4). The front of the house is enclosed by massive walls and an "iron gate which had not been opened in eighteen years" (p. 4). Once a day the father places money and letters in a "steel panel" in the gate and receives food and mail. This area of the estate is off limits to his daughters. The back of the house is enclosed also — this time by an enormous fence made of "iron pickets, fifteen feet high and so close together a man could hardly press a fist between them" (p. 5). This area belongs "to Evelyn, with Alicia to watch." It is "all the world to Evelyn, all the world she knew" (p. 5).

Though isolated and repressed by her family, the fifteen-year-old Evelyn experiences feelings and desires on a spring day "too beautiful to be borne" (p. 6). Her longings communicate a "call," which the idiot senses (p. 6). And for the first time in his life a portion of the vast barrier of his mental inadequacy begins to come down. He becomes "aware of the bursting within him of an encysted need," which "bursting so ... flung a thread across his internal gulf, linking his alive and independent core [his inner thing] to the ... animal around it. It was a sending straight to what was human in him" (p. 6). In responding to Evelyn's call, he steps closer to the realization of his potentiality.

Upon reaching Kew's picket fence, Lone thrusts his hand through an opening as far as possible, yearning "through the iron" (p. 7) and attempting to utter his feelings for the first time. Evelyn's desire for contact (*"Touch me, touch me"*) trembles

and swells the thread within him, "bridging his two selves" once again (p. 10) and enabling him to "reason" a way through the fence by breaking off the bottom end of a picket rusted by a stream and then using that piece to saw off another end. (The stream of her inner feelings, which have communicated with Lone, leads him to another kind of stream that enables him to penetrate the physical barrier to her.) His success in breaking through this barrier raises the vaguely conveyed yearning between them to communion: "... their silent radiations reached out to each other, mixed and mingled and meshed. Silently they lived in each other and then she bent and touched him, touched his face and shaggy hair.... They stayed close, one of her hands on his bare shoulder, and the currents of their inner selves surged between them" (pp. 11-12; cf. 15). Between Evelyn and Lone there is "a flow ... without guards or screens or barriers — no language to stumble over, no ideas to misunderstand, nothing at all but a merging" (p. 60). Although Mr. Kew discovers them together and beats them severely, the spark of awareness that Evelyn has ignited in the idiot does not die out: "For the first time he used his eyes consciously, purposely" — to protect himself from being killed by old man Kew (p. 13).

Badly beaten, Lone is discovered in the forest by a Mr. Prodd, brought to the open spaces of his farm and the generosity and tenderness of his wife, and there revived. Mrs. Prodd believes that "'He's no idiot'," but that he is afraid of the world because it is "'too much to live with'" (p. 17). Overcoming some of his fear through persistence and affection, she and her husband help him break through more barriers to community and self-awareness. He learns to give of himself, helping with the chores on the farm, to absorb messages for the first time consciously from the minds of others, and to articulate his own name — "*the single thing which is me and what I have done and been and learned*" — Lone (p. 20).

However, personal and social growth stops for a time after he realizes — even before the Prodds do — that they are going to have their own child and therefore want Lone to leave. Hurt and bitter, he returns to the forest, where he resumes his former way of life. There he converts a natural "trap," a "pitfall" (p. 44), into a refuge for himself, becoming once again isolated and alone. But the responsiveness of his "inner thing" to the needs of children does not die. He receives another "call" — this time from "someone who 'sent' like a child, but who was not a child" (p. 45).

The "call" comes from Janie. Like most of the other members of the emerging gestalt, she experiences obstacles to her develop-

ment. Her obstacles are created by her promiscuous and bigoted mother, Wima, who despises her daughter for spoiling her fun. Wima even resorts to "locking" Janie behind a door "in her room" (p. 29), but as a telekineticist she easily escapes. After Janie becomes friends with Bonnie and Beanie, black twins with the ability to teleport, Wima tries to lock her out of the house. She accepts this ostracism almost gladly, for she learns with the twins something far better than her relation with Wima. The "belonging" and "transcendent sharing" (p. 32) among Janie, Bonnie, and Beanie prompt them to leave their parents and pursue their own superior relationship.

Seeking shelter as run-aways, these children discover the isolated and now abandoned Kew estate. This is no forced coincidence on Sturgeon's part, but a stroke of inspiration by which he emphasizes artistically the renewal of Lone's social development and the continuing formation of homo gestalt. Once the provisions (the canned goods, etc.) at the Kew estate are depleted, Janie's needful call goes out. Having heard another call from the same imprisoning walls, Lone now penetrates them with ease and takes up (at first reluctantly) a new relationship greater than he has ever known. With Evelyn and the Prodds he experienced the beginnings of community. Those experiences and the isolation that has constituted most of his life move him to help not only Janie and the twins but also the mongoloid newborn son of the Prodds, who do not want him and therefore keep him hidden away in a decrepit bassinet. With the aid of "Baby" and Janie, Lone learns that he is the head of homo gestalt but that as an idiot he will confront many obstacles to helping it realize its full potentiality: together they stand at "the rugged foot of a mountain" (p. 61). The initial formation of this relationship takes place appropriately in the wild, for the gestalt is at its most primitive stage. And yet even at this stage, it succeeds in creating the world's first anti-gravity device — as a favor by Lone to Mr. Prodd so that his truck will no longer get stuck in the fields on his farm.

Lone's eventual successor as head of the gestalt, Gerry Thompson, has also experienced barriers and confinement, specifically in a state orphanage where he lived in hunger and loneliness on a daily basis. He manages to escape the orphanage but falls on hard times, nearly dying of starvation and exposure. Fortunately, Lone discovers him and takes him to the refuge in the woods, where Baby, the twins, and Janie have found some security. Because of his long-standing distrust of others, the "first thing" that Gerry "looked for [there] was the door" (p. 70). Thinking that Lone is

" 'from the [orphanage] school'," he opens "the door" (p. 71) to leave but is prevented — not as Kew confined his daughters or as Wima tried to confine Janie, but so that he will learn to "blesh" with the gestalt and thereby realize himself more fully. Because of his innate intelligence, Gerry is the obvious choice to be head of the gestalt after Lone is killed accidentally by a falling tree.

Before dying, Lone advises Gerry and the children to go and live with Alicia Kew, whom he once had a relationship with after the deaths of Evelyn and Mr. Kew. Subsequent to her father's death, Alicia tried to rebel against his repressive and reclusive ways. As she said to herself at one point, "I shall go among thousands on a beach at the edge of a sea which goes out and out without walls" (p. 24). After moving away from her father's estate, she takes residence "in a house . . . with windows overlooking a road . . . and children playing outside the hedge. The hedge is not a wall . . ." (p. 24). Her new house "is open to anyone," she thinks (p. 24), including Gerry and the children. Unfortunately, although she has escaped the confinement of the Kew estate, she cannot liberate herself fully from his ideas. With Alicia the gestalt finds security but also many obstacles to its growth. Because she remains bigoted and authoritarian, under her influence the members of the gestalt stop bleshing (p. 99).

To protect the gestalt and himself from being destroyed, Gerry decides to kill her, but in carrying out his decision he acquires a mental block — an "occlusion" — that keeps him from knowing why he murdered her. With the help of an "open-minded" psychiatrist named Dr. Stern (p. 114), Gerry learns that his occlusion is the " 'bridge [that is] washed out' " (p. 84; cf, p. 101) between confusion and clarity about himself and his relationship with the gestalt. And just as his ego is an obstacle to discovering who he is and what he is a part of, so it is a key to opening the doors of his mind and his relation to others. Before meeting Stern, the way Gerry broke through doors was to kick at them as he once did at Alicia's (p. 81). But at Stern's office he breaks through his occlusion by reliving the most terrifying experience of his life — the experience of " ' assuming a female ego'," recollecting from Alicia's perspective her painful and unsatisfying relation with Lone, who used her to learn about the gestalt and his own inadequate part in that relationship (p. 113). The experience of being plundered mentally and physically by Lone, who ignored Alicia as a person just as he was ignored in the past, and the experience of Lone's feelings of inadequacy as head of the gestalt are not only painful but also revealing to Gerry. He begins to see his part as

head of the gestalt. His power to enter the mind of someone else as he did with Miss Kew " 'got stronger and stronger. . . . And the more I grew, the more I felt . . . that Miss Kew had to be killed before she killed . . what I am' " (p. 114). Unfortunately, having been institutionalized, kicked around, and oppressed in one way or another most of his life, Gerry with his new self-knowledge resolves " 'to have fun' " (p. 116). Stern warns him that without an ethical dimension homo gestalt will remain isolated, " 'alone' " (p. 117), in spite of its great capacities. But Gerry, ignorant of ethics, erases Stern's memory and leaves the office, ready to have things his own way.

One of Hip Barrows' major functions is to make Gerry ethically conscious. He does this after he has endured obstacles and alienation in his own life — specifically from his father, who discouraged his talents in mathematics and electronics; the Air Force, which also discouraged his talents; and Gerry, who unbeknownst to Hip created the greatest obstacles in his life: confinement in jail and a mental block against recalling the last seven years of his life, especially how, why, and by whom his discovery of Lone's antigravity device was covered up. Out of affection for Hip and remorse for unwittingly participating in Gerry's cruel machinations, Janie extricates Hip from jail and takes him to an apartment, "high ceilinged, airy" and "with a bay window" (p. 122). Through her efforts and his own, the names, places, and events of his past seven years come back to him and he is liberated from his psychic shell into an expanding vision of himself and humanity. The process of breaking through his shell is arduous and sometimes painful. But Janie never pushes Hip, allowing him to penetrate his occlusion the only way he can — in his own mind. Thus he tells her: " '. . . it's as if my whole world . . . was once in a little place inside my head, so deep I couldn't see out. And then you made it as big as a room and then as big as a town and tonight as big as . . . well, a lot bigger' " (p. 138).

Appropriately enough, the most critical expansions of Hip's awareness take place in "open, rolling fields," a "meadow" (p. 154), where he recalls his discovery of the antigravity device, how that discovery led him to an even greater one — homo gestalt, and how Gerry as ego-centric head of the gestalt covered up Hip's findings in order to avoid publicity and maintain the gestalt for his own personal benefit. Feeling ashamed of his motives for discovering the antigravity device (personal gain and glory), Hip goes with Janie to Gerry's "retreat" in order to teach him shame and the beginnings of ethical consciousness.

Still alienated from society, Gerry lives behind massive walls in a house that is a "prison" (p. 175). Its entry-way gives Hip an overwhelming sense of confinement: "... the walls came in and the ceiling drew ... lower while the floor rose slightly, giving a completely disturbing ... perspective" (p. 176). Fortunately, however, his and Janie's confrontation with Gerry takes place in the most open area of his retreat — an area that looks "like a giant greenhouse ... the huge panes overhead curved down ... and met the open lawn — it was more a park. ... After the closeness and darkness of what he [Hip] had already seen it ... built in him a great exhilaration. It rose up and up and up rose his thought ..." (p. 178). In this place Hip grafts an ethical consciousness onto homo gestalt by making Gerry feel "'ashamed'" (p. 185). The barriers to the realization of this gestalt are now gone. Gerry's newly expanded vision gives him a sense of belonging, self-respect, and gratitude that he has never had. At the end of the novel he is welcomed by a chorus of past human geniuses, who have led the way to homo gestalt — to humanity without obstacles except one, conscience, which is really no obstacle but is its crowning glory: "... humbly, Gerry joined their company" (p. 188).

NOTES

[1] R. Dale Mullen, Review of *More Than Human, Science Fiction Studies*, 2 (1975), 286.

[2] *The Fantastic in Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), p. 122.

[3] *Science Fiction: History, Science, Vision* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), p. 64.

[4] *Selected Essays: 1917-1932* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1932), pp. 124-25.

[5] Theodore Sturgeon, *More Than Human* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1953), p. 115. Subsequent references to the novel are to this edition, indicated with page numbers in parentheses.

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